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A MODERN CRUSADER



CHAPTER I

THE NEW MINISTER

"EH, mither, yonder's a machine comin' up the glen, wi' a hantle boxes an' things outside. I doubt it'll just be the minister."

"Mercy me!" exclaimed in consternation Mrs. Macneil, postmistress and keeper of the general emporium of the village of Glendarff, who was to be honoured by being temporarily the new minister's landlady, "was ever the like? Why, the train canna have been mair than a quarter of an hour late. On this o' a' days to be sae near her time, when I'm behindhand wi' things! Rin, lassie, an' set out the tea. Ye'se find a clean cloth in the sittin'-room press. Never heed the sheets, woman. I'll see to them by an' by. If he does gang to his room before tea, he'll no' find out there are nane on the bed. I'm just through wi' the scones, an' I'll have the kettle on in a minute. Eh, ye feckless taupie, turn yon scones! Can ye no' see they're burnin'? That'll do. Now, awa'

an' set out the tea. He canna be here for a wee while yet. It's a sair brae for a heavy machine."

The calculation respecting the date of the minister's arrival was not a random guess. The village of Glendarff lay beyond the summit of the "sair brae" in question, and at a lower level, so the actual ascent was not within its ken. But the windings of the glen allowed to certain houses, of which Mrs. Macneil's was one, a glimpse of about a hundred yards of the road at a considerable distance. At that point alone could her daughter have seen the fly. Mrs. Macneil was therefore accurately informed how far off the minister was at the moment. Mary Macneil was an active lassie, and her mother's hands moved about as fast as her tongue. By their united efforts the surface, at least, of things was all in order by the time the panting horse stopped right gladly at the door; and Mrs. Macneil, with a smiling countenance and spotless apron, was standing on the threshold to welcome her lodger.

"Ye're in gude time the night, sir," she said. "I hope ye've made a comfortable journey?"

"Thank you, yes. But do you call it good time? The train was a quarter of an hour late."

"Oh yes, sir. She a' that, nae doubt. But then we count that extra gude time, ye ken. Forty minutes late is mair like the thing generally. Never heed a' thae things, sir. My man's only just down the garden; he'll be here this minute, an' help the driver wi' them. Tea's just ready. But ye'll maybe like to gang to yer bedroom first?"

The minister assented, and was conducted upstairs to a fairly comfortable bedroom. Then, after a brief period of confusion, scuffling of feet, bumping of boxes, and running up and down stairs, to ascertain what was to be brought up, what left below, quietness settled down upon the house, and a fragrant odour of ham and eggs, slowly spreading through its somewhat limited dimensions, penetrated at length into the bedroom, where the minister, after freeing himself from the soil and dust of a summer day's journey, had fallen into a reverie, and forcibly recalled to him the fact that he had eaten nothing since a rather early breakfast. Descending the stairs, he entered the sitting-room almost in company with the ham and eggs, and proceeded to make up for his long fast.

It was perhaps as well for his comfort that the ham and eggs, the hot scones, the toast, and Mr. Macneil's impending supper kept his landlady pretty closely tied to the kitchen, for the chance of getting first word with the new minister, and endeavouring, at least, to induce him to regard various subjects from her point of view, was not a prospect calculated to exercise a subduing influence on her loquacity. As it was, being not slow in observation of suggestive trifles, he made a mental note of a ceaseless murmur from the direction of the kitchen. Mrs. Macneil was in truth only biding her time. Mr. Macneil was provided with his supper rather more promptly than usual, her cooking apron was replaced by a smart embroidered one, and her hands

washed, some time before the sitting-room bell rang.

"Just bide where ye are, Mary," she said to her daughter. "It's but fittin' I wad see to the minister mysel' this first night, an' hear just what he may wish."

Disappointment awaited her. In the doorway of the sitting-room the minister met her. "I am going up to the manse, Mrs. Macneil," he said. "I appointed Dempster to meet me there at seven o'clock. I do not know exactly how long I may be absent; but if you will put a lamp and a bedroom candle in the sitting-room, I shall want nothing more to-night."

He spoke with a quiet decision of tone and manner not inducive of efforts to detain him. Mrs. Macneil had hardly time to say, "Very well, sir," before his hat was on, and he was stepping out on to the road. She captured the teapot and toast-rack, and returned to the kitchen in a critical mood, which had an undoubted trend towards hostility.

"He's a braw lad," said Mr. Macneil, mentally contemplating the barely twenty-five-year-old minister from the standing-point of sixty years of life.

"That's as may be," replied his wife sententiously. "But to my thinkin' he's ower young to want to settle himsel' in a lanesome place like this. Just a nice quiet bit for a middle-aged man, or one not ower strong. Young men should bide where the work's heavier. I doubt he's a bit lazy."

"He's a gran' preacher," said Mr. Macneil.

"Oh, of course," retorted his wife, whose mood was clearly contradictory. "It's aye the new broom's the best. Maybe in a while ye'll be findin' out he doesna preach ony better than the lave. To my mind, he'll never be the man auld Dr. Simpson was. Now, Mary, awa' an' fetch the tea dishes, an' then ye can tak' up these sheets an' mak' up the bed, an' see ye pit the towels straight, an' tidy up the room."

The newly elected minister of Glendarff, walking slowly towards the manse under the vigilant scrutiny of a far larger number of eyes than he at all suspected, was a square-shouldered, compactly-built man, rather over the middle height, with well-cut features, and a strong, resolute face. Critics less momentarily captious than Mrs. Macneil might have marvelled that a man of his age, carrying about him all the signs of both physical and mental energy, should care to bury himself in a lonely country parish. But the marvel was, after all, but another word for ignorance. It faded away the moment all the facts were known.

Arthur Reid was the only son of a Glasgow solicitor, a man possessed of a considerable share of professional ability, and a great deal of sound common sense, but sadly to seek in the domain of character. He possessed a good deal of that lazy good-nature which is often the accompaniment of a thoroughly selfish disposition, but he had probably never in his life felt the stirring of a really noble, lofty sentiment. His wife was English by birth, though a dweller in Scotland

from early childhood, and she was of a type more common south than north of the Tweed. She was a clever, intelligent woman, though not singularly gifted intellectually; but in character she was as noble as her husband was commonplace. Generous, ardent, and enthusiastic, and keenly sensitive to every vibration of the moral and spiritual atmosphere around her, she was pretty safely guaranteed against the enjoyment of any perilous amount of happiness in this world. Her friends rejoiced hugely over her most fortunate marriage. Cecil was so romantic, and deficient in ballast, that it was impossible to foresee what she might not have done had she remained wholly independent of external control. She might even have gone the length of imitating a certain example set nigh on two thousand years ago by the blue waters of Galilee, and sacrificed everything that could contribute to the rational enjoyment of life, in order to minister to suffering humanity. The controlling influence of Robert Reid was just what was required to keep her firm in the paths of sound common sense, and judicious recognition of the claims of suffering humanity, as coincident only with what might be regarded as absolute superfluity of income. Certainly after her marriage she became much quieter and more self-controlled than formerly; but one who made her acquaintance some years after that auspicious event averred he had never seen in any woman eyes so touchingly wistful an expression.

Arthur Reid, born several years after the marriage, was the only child of his parents, and

the cause of a mighty hubbub among the various branches of that prolific family, when the intelligence burst upon them that he was to be named Arthur. Arthur, indeed ! This was one of Cecil's absurd whims, and really the extent to which Robert gave in to them was quite ridiculous. When had the Reids been known to depart from the time-honoured Scottish custom that every first-born son, in each house, should bear the name of the paternal grandfather ? Of course the child ought to be named Robert, and add yet another to the already multitudinous host of Roberts quite lately the cause of a terrible family quarrel. This Robert had opened some letters intended for that Robert. He said it was a mistake ; but his wife had retailed some of that Robert's private affairs to the wife of yet another Robert. She forthwith declared war upon sundry other Roberts respecting some cutting remarks in some of these letters on "our cousin Robert," which she declared were aimed at her husband. Thereupon that Robert turned viciously on this Robert, and asserted his belief the initiatory blunder had been no blunder at all, but an act of deliberate treachery. Fearful had been the din of battle, but never had man or woman dared the attempt to disentangle the various Roberts mixed up in the fray. Cecil Reid had taken the lesson to heart, and even her husband's allegiance to the time-honoured custom had been shaken. He never dared to let his relations know his English wife had termed it a ridiculous nuisance. But he stoutly insisted his son should bear what name she pleased ; gladly, perhaps,

casting on her the odium of this heinous innovation.

So Arthur the boy was named, and his mother, with a strange light in her eyes, would sometimes call the chubby, sturdy infant her "blameless king,"—whereat outraged orthodoxy and good sense again took umbrage. Did not the blessed Scriptures declare we were all shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin? Who could be blameless? And what chance had Robert's son of ever being a king? Cecil was just perfectly ridiculous, really, it would seem, off her head. The boy had been a wild romp of a child, a sturdy, mischievous boy, but, as his father boasted, never mean or underhand, and never caught telling a lie. It was not until after a somewhat uproarious term or two at the university that he suddenly announced his wish to be a minister. "All right," said his father; "please yourself. Had there been half a dozen of you, I might have felt it my duty to suggest a profession on which you can live, instead of one on which you only starve. But as it is, you will have fortune enough of your own to render it immaterial."

Vain boast! Even before the boy was old enough to take orders, people had begun to remark that Mr. Reid was ageing very fast, and looked very careworn; and soon after Arthur had been ordained as assistant in a crowded town parish, his father's sudden death brought to light the fact that he had been for some years struggling on the verge of bankruptcy, dragged down by the failure of commercial enterprises with which he

had been connected. Arthur faced the discovery bravely enough. "Thank God there is enough to clear off all outstanding debts," he said; "and I can take good care of myself. If only my mother had a little larger income, I should not trouble myself." Mrs. Reid's own little fortune was, however, sufficient to keep her in tolerable comfort for the first year or two of her widowhood. But then an internal complaint developed itself, not inconsistent with some years of life, but incurable, and rendering her a partially helpless invalid. Under these altered circumstances her narrow income was wholly insufficient. Her son must do something more than maintain himself. It was while he was anxiously revolving the course demanded of him by this sudden change in his circumstances, that friends cognisant of all the facts urged him strongly to come forward as a candidate for the vacant living of Glendarff, the stipend of which was rendered by the presence of minerals on the glebe a rather better one than usual. Some local circumstances also they thought were in his favour. He at once sought the minister to whom he was assistant, and announced his intention of trying for the vacancy.

"Well, Mr. Reid, I shall be very sorry, I am sure, to lose your help," said his senior. "Your preaching has been very acceptable, and your activity and energy in parish work most commendable. But if you feel that the voice of the Lord is calling you to work in that particular corner of His vineyard, it is not for me to withstand your purpose."

"I don't feel anything of the kind, sir. I simply have an invalid mother, much in need of comforts her income is not sufficient to provide, and I want the stipend of Glendarff in order that I may make up the deficiency."

"And may not that be the nature of the Lord's call, my young friend?" asked the elder minister, with much suavity of manner.

"I don't look for special divine direction when the fulfilment of an obvious duty is in question. I prefer my reasons for trying for this post to be distinctly stated."

"A very able young man that," said the minister afterwards to one of his elders, "and promises to be a very eloquent preacher, but I could wish he were a little more spiritual."

"Yes, indeed, sir. I cannot but feel myself one sees more of gifts than of graces in that quarter."

The sagacity of Arthur Reid's friends was justified by the event. He was the almost unanimously chosen candidate for the vacant living. There was no thought of his mother accompanying him to his new home, so lonely a spot was no suitable dwelling-place for her. He only waited to see her comfortably settled in the more luxurious quarters now at her command, and then set off to enter upon his new duties.

This lonely village of Glendarff, to which a sense of filial duty had consigned Arthur Reid at the very outset of his ministerial career, hidden in a shallow depression high among the rugged, precipitous hills which stood sentinel around it on every side, was, in actual fact, hardly so far

6 removed from at least the fringes of modern civilisation as first appearances warranted one in supposing. The train, after leaving the little wayside station at which the minister had alighted, held on its course in a south-westerly direction along the seashore, until it reached the flourishing little watering-place of Netherport, some six miles farther along the coast. The minister's fly, meantime, after following for a short distance a level road running almost parallel with the railway, turned nearly due west up a wild, picturesque glen. In its depths an impetuous mountain torrent brawled seawards with much foaming and fretting, over mossy stones and round great boulders of impeding rock. Through a thick copse of oak, hazel, and birch, with here and there a stately beech, a feathery larch, or a gnarled oak, towering high above the undergrowth, the road wound onwards and upwards for a distance of some four miles, until, having attained its greatest altitude, high above not only the brawling river, but its fringing copsewoods, it curved suddenly down a shallow incline, and became the main and only thoroughfare of Glendarff, street or road, according as it pleased the observer to concentrate his attention upon its urban characteristics of gutters, pumps, and sprawling children, or its rural ones of fragmentary hedges, and grassy margins, in the many gaps between the straggling houses. Glendarff was, in a straight line, about as near to Netherport station as to that from which the minister had been driven ; but the direct road to Netherport was not available for anything supported on wheels. It was a rugged mountain

road, possible only for foot passengers or skilled riders, running nearly due south over the range of hills which intervened between Glendarff and the sea-coast. For about half a mile, at its highest level, it was a strange, weird scene, which visitors to Netherport often climbed the hill with grief and dolour in order to visit. It there passed through a sort of miniature cañon, a rent in the rocks known as the Witches' Pass, where the frowning crags in places almost met overhead, and where twilight reigned even on a summer day. Entering the pass from the Glendarff side, it seemed to a stranger as though he were plunging into a blind alley, blocked at the farther end by a huge mass of rock. Only on reaching the very point where all farther progress seemed impossible did he perceive that a sharp turn to the right enabled him to round this projecting mass, and step out in a moment on to the southern slope of the range. And what a prospect then opened out before him! An illimitable expanse of sky, seeming in the far distance to mingle with an immeasurable extent of sea, all flecked with white wings, or streaked with thin black streaks, the legacy of coasting steamers. Immediately below lay the town of Netherport, stretching two straggling arms of villas on each side along the shore. Beyond both, to right and left, was spread out a variegated expanse of pastoral scenery.

The village of Glendarff would probably have been neither where nor what it was but for the existence of a seam of coal, rendered by the near neighbourhood of Netherport profitable enough to be worth

working. This coal, extending under the glebe, gave the living its increased value. The population was for the most part composed of colliers, and the condition of church, manse, and schools was satisfactory. Of course there was a public-house, and it bore the ill-omened name of The Miner's Rest. This public-house was a bone of contention. The total abstainers of Glendarff, a body more combative than numerous, stoutly maintained no such place was needed in the village. The majority did not much trouble themselves about this opinion, so long as no effort was made to deprive them of the consolations of the house. They only retorted, with the irritating sarcasm of truth, that the total abstainers were themselves indirectly its most active upholders. There was in Netherport a Convalescent Home, conducted on the strictest total abstaining principles, with a hard and fast rule that instant expulsion should be the fate of whomsoever of its occupants should be caught consuming alcoholic drinks of any sort in a licensed house. As a result, its inmates most undoubtedly did toil up assiduously to visit the Witches' Pass, and stroll down right joyously into Glendarff, to indemnify themselves at The Miner's Rest for their enforced abstinence, without the risk of discovery attending such fractures of rules and regulations in Netherport itself. George Duncan, the landlord of The Miner's Rest, it is true, expressed much indignation against the calumniators of the inmates of the Home, adding, in confidence, to his special cronies, "Can't the blooming idiots hold their tongues? There's no telling what these whey-faced water-drinkers

may take it into their heads to do if they are always getting this cast in their teeth. If they should set the Home people up to watching the place, I might lose a good half of my summer drawings."

CHAPTER II

THE UTILITY OF SPASMS

THE post-office was at one end of Glendarff; the church and manse stood near together on a rising ground a little behind the main road, very near to the other end. Thus Mr. Reid had to pass through nearly the whole length of the village in order to keep his appointment, and his progress presented features somewhat akin to those of a paddle steamer in smooth water. Before him all was tranquil repose, behind him was seething and turmoil. The windows and doors he was approaching were decorously unoccupied; those he was leaving in his rear swarmed with eager forms and faces. Miners in various stages of cleansing from the results of their grimy occupation, women trim and tidy, or slatternly and half-clad, children with jam-besmeared faces, or with "pieces" in their hands, eagerly crowded to every available point of view in order to enjoy a good stare at the new minister.

All unobservant, Arthur Reid passed on his leisurely course. He was gifted, if the paradox may pass, with a most valuable negation—a total absence of all self-consciousness. It never occurred

to him to think that people might be observing him, for on the only occasions when the fact was unmistakably thrust upon his notice—those on which he occupied the pulpit—he was too much absorbed in observing them to have any thought to bestow upon his own personality. He was arranging in his mind as he walked various questions he wished to ask the church officer. He was, indeed, even more absolutely without any knowledge of local circumstances than is usual in such cases. His one appearance in the church had so clearly placed him far ahead of all other candidates that the committee had gladly avoided all the difficulty and expense involved in another more limited contest, and he had never been near Glendarff again until the day of his induction, a few days previously to his final arrival, when he had had little time to make inquiries which on the occasion of his first visit it would have been a grave indiscretion on his part to assume that it was necessary for him to make.

The church officer met him at the manse door, and conducted him over the house, ready to descant freely upon its merits and demerits. But he found his opportunities limited. Where his own affairs were in question, the minister was short in speech, prompt in action, and Dempster gathered little food for future interesting discussions from this preliminary visit. Mr. Reid went rapidly through the rooms, asked a few questions with that irritating terseness which renders it difficult to avoid a direct answer, made sundry notes in a pocket-book, and then said—

"You have the key of the church?"

"Yes, sir; I've brought it."

"Then let us go there at once, ere the light fails."

As they entered the church Mr. Dempster made his first point. The moment they passed the threshold the minister removed his hat, and he said to himself, "Ane o' thae new-fangled men, I doubt. Ower ta'en up wi' the externals o' religion."

But if the minister respected the building, he did not respect its atmosphere, close, heavy, and evil-smelling. "Faugh!" he said, as he stepped into it from the pure freshness of the summer evening air. "Are the windows ever opened?"

"Weel, sir, ye ken," pleaded the church officer, "that's a maist troublesome matter. Ye'd hardly credit the worry I've had about it. What wi' them that has nae hair, an' them that has weak chests, or caulds, or somethin', there's nae gettin' a window open onywhere wi'out a grumblin'; an' I'll allow I've ta'en at last just to lettin' them alane."

"I should think the congregation go to sleep a good deal during the service. Do they not?"

Dempster thought he saw his opportunity for a neat and presumably useful compliment. "I'll no' say but they have been a good bit used that way, sir; but I doubt there'll be nae mair o' that now."

The adroitly implied flattery seemed to miss its mark.

"Yes, I hope there will be a change," said the minister. "The windows must be kept open all

through the week. People would be more than human if they could keep awake in such an atmosphere. Ah, I see there is a harmonium. It was not played the Sunday I was here," he added decisively. His ear was keen, and the psalmody of Glendarff had scored a very deep mark in his memory.

"Oh no, sir. It hasna been played this year past."

"How is that?"

"Weel, sir, it was Miss Davidson used to play it."

"Who is Miss Davidson? The schoolmistress?"

"Oh no, sir. That's Miss Tomlinson — the schoolmaster's daughter. Miss Davidson's the laird's daughter. Him that lives in the white house out by, under the fir wood yonder, at the foot o' the hill. He's only a sma' laird, ye ken, an' he's been a widower since ever she was a wee lassie. He was marriet on"—

"Yes, yes," struck in the minister impolitely. "But why doesn't she play the harmonium now?"

"Weel, sir, ye see there was a bit o' a quarrel. There was by way o' bein' a choir, an' Dr. Munro, he's a fair gude singer, trained them a bit. They do say he's courtin' Miss Davidson. But then there was a niece o' Mr. Mackenzie's—ye'll mind Mr. Mackenzie, sir, him that's manager at the pits? I think ye stappit ae nicht there, when ye cam' to preach."

"Yes, I know him."

"Weel, as I was sayin', his niece cam' frae E'nbra to stay wi' him, an' they do say she was

daft about the doctor. Anyway, she was geyly set against Miss Davidson, an' said she didna play the instrument richtly ava. Now, I'll no' gie in to that, sir. I'm a bit o' a musician mysel', though I'm no' gleg to boast o't. It ill becomes ony man to be soundin' his ain praises. But I'll tak' it on me to say, wi'out fear o' contradiction frae ony, that ken what they're talkin' about, that Miss Davidson's a fair gude player, for a young leddy that's no' had great advantages. But some stuck-up lads an' lasses in the choir, wha couldna hae tellt a sharp frae a flat to save their lives, thought it a gran' thing to say the same as a leddy frae E'nbra, an' they set up their cheek, an' said they couldna sing to Miss Davidson's playing. Then, ae nicht, at the practisin', Sandy Sproat, the blacksmith's son, said somethin' vera ill-bred to her, an' Dr. Munro up and just kicket him out o' the church. An' there's been nae choir nor harmonium since."

The minister smiled grimly. "I see," he said; "the old story. Love upsetting harmony."

"Weel, not exactly that way, sir," replied Dempster, with the complacent smile of a man conscious of being quite at home with his subject. "The choir aye sang in unison, no' in harmony. They hadna got that far in their teaching."

"Ah! It was a case, then, of unison without unity. That would be a fine working illustration for a sermon some day, wouldn't it, Dempster?"

He spoke with all becoming gravity, though the corners of his mouth were twitching.

Dempster, not having the faintest idea what he meant, thought it well to take his stand on the

sure ground of a complimentary reply of a vaguely general character. "I've no sort o' doubt, sir, ony illustration in your hands wad turn out maist strikin' an' suitable."

The result was not exactly to his mind. Mr. Reid laughed outright. Dempster highly approved of a compliment being received with a gracious smile, but there was something not satisfactory about a downright laugh. "Sounds sort o' mockin' like," was his idea. The minister, however, made no further allusion to the musical affairs of the church, but proceeded to put questions regarding all sorts of small parochial details, pulling Dempster up in his tendency to wander with a promptness and persistency which did not tend to heighten that worthy's opinion of him.

The purple shadows were deepening on the silent hills, and the golden sunset light was fading from the western sky, when the two men left the church. The minister, wishing his subordinate good-night, walked straight away homewards. Dempster's route lay in the same direction, but some mysterious difficulty with the lock of the churchyard gate detained him until Mr. Reid had gained about a hundred yards' start of him. Then he followed in a leisurely manner, and, keeping a strict watch on the receding form, to satisfy himself that the minister had not acquired the bad habit of looking behind him, slipped adroitly through the open door of The Miner's Rest, lured thither by the gratifying certainty he would be, for the moment, a person of extreme importance.

"Eh, man, David, come awa'," exclaimed his

special crony, the blacksmith. "So ye've been havin' a crack wi' the minister? Come an' tell us a' about him. An' what'll ye tak', man?"

"Just a half o' whisky, an' thank ye," responded Mr. Dempster, with a manner judiciously compounded of dignity and urbanity. "But as for tellin' ye a' about the minister, it's no' in the course o' an hour's talk ower matters o' business that everything about a man's found out, Mr. Sproat."

"But ye can tell us what opinion ye've formed o' him."

"Indeed, sir, ye're greatly mista'en there. I'm no' a man to form opinions in a hurry. Thae sort o' opinions haven't got ony wear in them; an' I've nae mind to have to hunt up fresh ones every day. I like opinions that have got some bottom to stand on, an' 'll wear well."

"Hoot, man! Ye maun hae picked up some notion what like the man is."

"Oh ay, I'm no' denyin' that. One canna be face to face wi' a man for ten minutes wi'out gettin' notions about him. But notions are no' opinions, ye ken, an' I doubt they're best kept to onesel'. Say I came in here an' telt ye, 'I've a notion the minister's this, or that.' Like enough, somebody gangs an' says, 'That's Dempster's opinion;' an' maybe ere ever he says it, I've seen the notion wasna the thing ava, an' am thinkin' clean different about the matter. Na, na, sir. It's only becomin' for a man in my position to be extra cautious."

"That's no' gude enough, Dempster," laughed

another acquaintance. "I doubt you an' the minister didna hit it off ower weel, or ye'd no' be sae blate wi' yer notions an' opinions."

"Then just let me tell you, sir, ye're clean wrang. When twae men meet, as it were, officially, ane to ask questions, an' the ither to give information, there's nae great room for hittin' or no' hittin' it aff. I'm free to confess I doubt the minister 'll no' hae the pleasant ways o' auld Dr. Simpson. I think he's no' the sort o' man that'll stand an' hae a canty crack wi' a body about a' things, when one meets him. But there'll maybe be a change in that. Nae doubt in thae big toun parishes there's a sair hantle o' wark, an' nae muckle time for friendly intercourse. Still, I'm nae denyin' if Mr. Reid turns out a friendly, sociable sort o' a body, I'll be mair surprised than if he proves an upsettin' sort o' a cheil."

Having thus played oracle with due precautions in the way of hedging, Mr. Dempster declined to be drawn any farther along the risky path of expressing opinions regarding a man of whose character and disposition he had failed to catch the faintest indication. After resisting with due dignity various efforts in that direction, he rose and retired from the company.

"Deil tak' the fellow!" exclaimed the irate blacksmith, as the door closed behind the departing church officer. "If I'd had a notion he meant to be sae desperately close, I'd have seen him hanged or ever I'd have wasted my siller treatin' him. He's"—

He was interrupted by a sudden burst of laughter

from a comrade who was sitting close to the window.

"Eh, man, Adam," he exclaimed, slapping his thigh with appalling force, "but Dempster's dune it. He's a' but rin into the very arms o' the minister, comin' doun the road wi' our young boss. Eh, man, but Dempster 'll be fair mad. He aye lets on to be sae desperately respectable, an' quite above visitin' The Miner's Rest."

Too true it was that fickle fortune had played the church officer this shabby trick. Arthur Reid, on reaching his temporary home, had found his landlady lying in wait for him in the open doorway, but not, on this occasion, with any purpose calling for prompt measures. She was watching for him in order to tell him that Mr. Alan Mackenzie, the manager's son, was waiting to see him.

"You have surely stolen a march on us, Mr. Reid," the young man said, after greeting the minister very cordially. "My father cannot find your letter, but he felt quite sure to-morrow was the day you fixed for your arrival."

"It was a very stupid blunder on my part, if I did," the minister replied. "Luckily for me, I did not thus mislead Mrs. Macneil."

"Well, my father is much annoyed at our apparent want of cordiality. He could hardly believe it when he heard you had actually arrived. He fully intended coming to see you himself, but one of our men has managed to get himself hurt to-day, and he was obliged to go and see about him. He sent me to beg you would come over and have supper with us."

"Most gladly. I shall be only too pleased to have the chance of asking your father a number of questions."

Thus it came about that the ill-fated church officer, who had with all caution eluded the minister's notice when there was not the least chance of his observing him, now all but ran against him when he deemed vigilance wholly superfluous. He caught Arthur Reid's quick glance from him upwards to the highly imaginative work of art over the door whence he had issued, in which a local artist, with a flight of fancy worthy of the most aspiring of house agents, had depicted a certain table and benches in the garden of The Miner's Rest as a sylvan bower shaded by dense foliage of an appalling tint of green, with sundry figures, presumably miners, reposing therein in a sort of restful ecstasy, and he groaned in spirit. All these new-fangled men were total abstainers. What would all the compliments he had managed to pay the new minister avail, weighed against this unlucky meeting? Then he bethought him of spasms. Yes, there was hope in spasms. On the first chance he would explain how, though not a total abstainer on principle, he held "the drink" to be a thing all decent men should be most cautious about, and public-houses just a curse to the country, and lament that tendency to spasms which forced him, occasionally, quite unexpectedly, to seek the alleviating influence of a small quantity of spirits.

"Is Dempster given to frequenting that place?" the minister asked his companion.

"Oh no. I don't think so. He is a sober enough sort of man, I believe."

"And the house. What character does it bear?"

"A very fair one. My father watches it pretty closely, as you may imagine, and does not find much amiss. There are very rarely any rows there, and Duncan deals very promptly with any unruly visitors."

They found the manager just returned from his visit to the injured collier, and full of regrets for the misapprehension which had resulted in the dearth of all welcome to the new minister.

"I was very sorry to be obliged to depute Alan to represent me," he said; "but the man who got himself hurt has no belongings of his own, and lodges with a rather stupid old woman, so as I have no feminine belongings to look after such matters for me, I had to go and see about him myself."

"How is he?" asked the son. "Is he badly hurt?"

"I hope not very seriously; but we shall hear presently. I left word for Munro to come on here to supper after he had seen him. He is our local doctor," he added to the minister. "I thought you would like to meet him."

"Does Glendarff maintain a doctor on its own account?" asked the minister in surprise.

"No, it does not. Until within the last two years we were dependent on Netherport for medical assistance, a pleasant state of things, considering that barring the Witches' Pass, hardly a road a doctor could be expected to follow, we are

ten miles from the town. It was just about two years ago we lost one of our best men through an accident most unlikely to have proved fatal could we have got a doctor within any reasonable time. Our proprietor is a very kind-hearted man, and was much concerned about it. He promised then that if a doctor could be induced to settle in Glendarff, he would supplement any profit he could make with a certain fixed income. Dr. Munro is of course a young man, but he is certainly clever, and he does not get drunk—advantages by no means the rule in men willing to come to such out-of-the-way places as this.”

“I suppose your proprietor is one of the leading heritors?” said the minister.

“Yes. But he is never here. I hold his mandate.”

“And the others?”

“Well, practically, there are but two others. The interest of a few smaller ones is so fractional that they rarely trouble themselves to interfere in any way. There is Mr. Davidson at Glendyne.”

“The father of the young lady who played the harmonium?”

“The same. You have been hearing about that business?”

“Yes. Dempster explained to me how harmony had bred discord.”

Mr. Mackenzie laughed. “I am afraid a niece of mine had some hand in that disaster. She is young, and, as yet, more musical than cautious. I took her sharply to task for not holding her tongue. Miss Davidson really got on very well,

for a girl who has had so few advantages. Mind, however, what you say in that direction. Munro is supposed to be smitten. Where the attraction lies, except in her being an only child, I don't know. She is a strange, and I should have thought to a young fellow like Munro, a most unattractive girl."

"And her father?"

"Not much good from your point of view. An ordinary specimen of the grasping, hard-natured, small laird. Of course, old Mr. Duff, at Craigmore, is the leading heritor."

"I never heard of him."

The manager laughed. "You'll hear quite as much as you'll care to hear before long, I suspect. The parish is an extensive one in point of acreage, and far the larger part of it belongs to Mr. Duff. Have you been through the Witches' Pass to Netherport?"

"No."

"Well, on the western side of the road the parish runs down to the sea-coast. Craigmore, a fine house, stands on the slope of the hill, looking out over the sea, and a considerable tract of the wild country lying back among the hills here, belong to Mr. Duff. He bought the property about twelve years since."

"And what was he previously?"

"What he still remains—a very wealthy distiller."

"Faugh!" ejaculated the minister, with an unmistakable accent of disgust.

"Do you particularly object to distillers?"

"I object to all fabricators of intoxicating drinks who make big fortunes thereby."

"But you are not a total abstainer."

"No, I am not."

"Then there is surely a flaw in your logic. You make use of the article, yet object to the producer?"

"No, I don't necessarily object to him. I object to his big fortune. If the use of alcohol was strictly confined to what is really consistent with the well-being of the people at large, would there be big fortunes made out of the sale of intoxicating drinks?"

"Well, hardly, I should think."

"Exactly. Therefore a man who thus makes a big fortune seems to me to be amassing wealth by the ruin, soul and body, of his fellow-creatures, and I loathe him."

Mr. Mackenzie eyed him curiously for a moment. Then he asked—

"What would you have done had you been the son of a wealthy distiller?"

The minister laughed. "Gone into Parliament, most likely, and ranted about philanthropy, and denounced everybody who allowed selfish considerations to stand in the way of the welfare of the people. Do you suppose because I see a thing clearly, in principle, which does not in any way affect me, I therefore set up for that perfect monster in whom principle and practice are ever one and indivisible?"

"Well," replied the manager, discreetly waiving the question, "I am not sure I go with you

entirely ; but as far as old Samuel Duff is concerned, I am afraid your loathing is not unmerited. But of that more hereafter. I think I heard the door-bell ring. It will probably be Munro."

CHAPTER III

QUESTIONABLE PARISHIONERS

DR. MUNRO shortly entered the room, a good-looking, active young man, apparently about the same age as the minister, to whom he was forthwith duly presented.

"Well, what of Millroy?" the manager asked, after a few desultory remarks.

"I don't think the injuries are dangerous, but the falling coal has knocked his shoulder and side about a good deal, and he has had altogether a severe shaking. I think you will have to do without him for a week or two, at the least."

"There will be no great difficulty in that. He is not the sort of man whom it is hard to spare."

"I should think not," said the doctor. "He is not exactly of the type from which one expects much intelligence. But he seems a curious sort of fellow altogether. It is very difficult to get anything out of him. Has he been here long?"

"About a year; and if you wish to fathom the full difficulty of getting anything out of him, try and find out anything about his antecedents. He turned up here suddenly, no one knew from whence, and asked for work. We happened to want a hand

or two at the moment, and I took him on, and finding he did very well in any place not needing very much intelligence, have kept him on. He is the most taciturn fellow I ever knew. The foreman told me to-day that during all the time he has been here no one has ever been able to draw a word out of him as to who he is, where he came from, or what brought him here."

"Probably he does not know himself."

"Oh, I think he does. There is a certain method in his impenetrability. He can be fairly up to the average, too, in intelligence, by fits and starts. But he seems to be generally brooding over something, in a sort of sullen, dreamy way, and then he hardly seems to know what he is doing. He would not have been hurt to-day if he had had his wits about him, for some of the men shouted to him in plenty of time, but he did not seem to take in their meaning until too late."

"Just what I should expect," Dr. Munro said. "One of those fellows whose senses seem somehow not properly hooked on to their brains, and so their sense-impressions either never reach the brain at all, or if they do, not until too late to be of the least use. Does he drink?"

"Drink? No!" exclaimed the manager. "If you try him on that subject, you'll very quickly find out some of his sense-impressions can reach his brain fast enough."

"Oh, then he wasn't putting it on."

"Putting on what?"

"A holy horror of drink. I always suspect patients who are very vehement in their protest-

ations. Of course, the pulling about of his shoulder gave him a good deal of pain, and I thought he looked rather faint, so I asked him if he would not like a little whisky."

The manager and his son both laughed.

"By Jove," said the younger man, "it is lucky for you he is helpless."

"So I immediately discovered. You might have thought I had offered him some insufferable insult. I never saw such a murderous look come into a man's face in my life, on such small provocation. I am sure if he could have moved he would have knocked me down."

"I have not the least doubt of it. There is no dreamy apathy about him when that question comes to the front. I don't think there can be a doubt drink has, in some way, exercised a tragical influence on his life. When he first came here, and the men found nothing would induce him to touch spirits, some of the wilder ones, of course, tried to make him do so, and finding he got very excited about it, teased him all the more. At last, one day, a great hulking young fellow, who had drunk a good deal more than was good for him, tried to force him to drink some whisky. Luckily, the foreman came up at the moment, or there would have been murder. Millroy was sharp enough in his movements then. He was at the fellow in a moment, with a big knife in his grasp. I spoke very sharply about it, and told the men I would dismiss any man instantly whom I caught saying a word to him on the subject. I had no wish to have a murder case at the pits."

"No," said the minister meditatively, "it would be undesirable. Still, how curious it would be if this man Millroy should chance some day to be hung for a murder resulting from strenuous resistance of drink, in company with some man hung for a murder resulting from giving way to drunkenness. There seems to be something wrong somewhere, doesn't there?"

"The distiller, perhaps," suggested the manager, with a smile.

"More likely," said Dr. Munro, "the man who doctors the distiller's productions. But, after all, Mr. Reid, your two hypothetical murderers might be nearer of kin than appears at first sight. It may be some tragedy arising from drink that has brought Millroy into this curious condition."

"Ah," said the minister lightly, "you are going in for scientific accuracy of deduction. My dear fellow, you will upset half the moral teaching of the universe. I shall have carefully to reserve some of my most telling sermons for occasions when I observe you are not in church."

"Oh, you won't be greatly restricted in their use, then," said Alan Mackenzie, just as supper was announced.

"Our roads lie in the same direction," Dr. Munro said, as he and the minister emerged from the manager's house, about an hour later. "My den is a short distance this side of The Miner's Rest. Are you a very early man at night, Mr. Reid?"

"By no means. To a student night-hours are far too valuable to be wasted in slumber."

"Then come in with me for an hour or two.

It is only just half-past ten. I never go to bed early save when I have been having a heavy spell of night-work. But perhaps," he added, with a laugh, "after young Mackenzie's insinuations you will feel your ministerial character imperilled by such association."

"I generally leave my ministerial character to take care of itself. If it is not robust enough to do that, I can't help it. I object to the charge of very fragile commodities. But is it true you never go to church?"

"In for it," murmured the doctor to himself. But he answered boldly enough—

"It has been true. I don't think you would wonder if you could have heard poor old Dr. Simpson, worthy man, droning over, Sunday after Sunday, the sermons he had droned over in regular order for, I suppose, the last twenty years."

"All the same, a man cannot afford to give up going to church. What do you do at home while service is going on?"

"Generally look over and rub up my instruments, when I have no particular patients to visit," the doctor answered, with a laugh.

"Exactly. Therefore from one year's end to another you have nothing to remind you you have a moral nature at all. I suppose you wouldn't expect to get on very satisfactorily if you resolved to give up eating because you did not care for the food available. If you go in for blank materialism, and believe yourself a sort of fortuitous concurrence of atoms, and nothing more, then your practice is

consistent with your creed. Otherwise, a man can't afford to give up going to church."

"I daresay I shall go now."

"I daresay you will, for a time at least, in order to be prepared with critical opinions on my sermons. Is this your den?" he added, as his companion paused.

"Yes, so we can adjourn this discussion. It is getting too complicated for me. Do you ever smoke, Mr. Reid?" he asked, as he ushered the minister into his general sitting-room.

"An occasional cigarette."

"All right. I have plenty. I am glad you do not altogether repudiate tobacco. It is a wonderful aid to conversation. There are the cigarettes; and there," he added, placing a case on the table, "are both sherry and whisky. Further I dare not go. So far I should hardly have ventured had I not observed at supper you were not *yet* a rigid total abstainer."

"Why yet?"

"Oh, because all ministers in this neighbourhood give in sooner or later. Dr. Crosbie is a mighty pillar of the movement, and the weight of his ponderous disapproval crushes all power of resistance out of them. In a little while you won't venture to drink an innocent glass of sherry—in public."

"If the time comes when I merit that insinuation, by all means give up coming to church when I am there. A man with a starved moral nature is the last who should risk the peril of a poisonous moral atmosphere."

"Well, if you take that view of it, there's a deal of moral poison loose about these parts. Dr. Crosbie is thoroughly staunch, I believe. I don't think anything would induce him to touch a drop of alcohol wittingly. But several ministers about here have admitted to me they decline it in public because when there is such a strong feeling about it they think it a duty to avoid causing offence, but that they take their glass of wine or spirits in private when they feel inclined."

"They have plenty of support in that practice. But, as a question naturally suggested by the subject before us, can you tell me anything about the man who is, I find, the principal heritor in this parish, Mr. Duff?"

"Rather. I suppose Mackenzie has been telling you of him?"

"Very little. But I gathered his opinion of him was low."

"I should think so; but I doubt if Mackenzie knows as much as I do, or perhaps I ought more correctly to say, have good warrant for believing. That Duff is, though quiet enough, really a profligate old rascal, I think there is little doubt. But that is his own affair. It is in his commercial capacity he lies under strong suspicion of being such a poisonous old scoundrel. I was told when I first came here, and certainly with some strong confirmatory evidence, that there was grave doubt if his whole fortune had been honestly made, even as the word is ordinarily used, by his distillery. He is greatly maligned if he is not the owner of a number of public-houses of the worst type in

several of our large towns, and if he does not manufacture a special class of spirits for consumption in them. Curiously enough, just after I had been hearing all this, I was hastily summoned to an old spinster named Kelly, living in Glendarff, who had met with a serious accident. I was told she was sister to a gamekeeper of Mr. Duff's, who lives at a lonely cottage in a wild part of the hills, some five miles from the village. It then came suddenly back to my recollection that in my student days a message had come to the hospital, one evening, for someone to go instantly to a rather notorious public-house in the neighbourhood, where there had been an accident. The house surgeon was out, so I went. The accident had, of course, been a fight, and a man had had an artery cut by a broken bottle. I had to go back several times before he could be moved. It was a villainous place, and the landlord's name was Kelly. Not long after there was unquestionable murder there. The place was suddenly closed, and Kelly disappeared. It struck me as a fact worth making a note of, that this public-house-owning old distiller should have a gamekeeper named Kelly, and I made some inquiries about him from his nearest neighbour, Mr. Bryce, the tenant of Mossend Farm, about two miles from his cottage. I found the man had been established where he is certainly not very long after Kelly's disappearance from Edinburgh; that Bryce has a very low opinion of him, and can never make out that he looks much after game. It is, at least, a remarkable coincidence."

"A most interesting one. Was he supposed to be an active participant in this murder?"

"Oh no. It was a man named Lane, or Laing, or some such name, employed about the place. He murdered his wife. They lived in the house. He was hung for it, and I remember all the evidence showed the place to be scandalous to the last degree. The frantic violence of people who got drunk there was notorious, and, of course, indicated the most poisonous adulteration of the drink they got."

"And this man Kelly—you have seen him, I suppose?"

"Rather. I had a personal encounter with him, and knocked him down in The Miner's Rest."

"Nonsense! Really, you seem a lively set about here."

"It was over his sister's case. She was very superior to him. I think he must have been born in a better position. She had an annuity, left her, she said, by a family in whose service she had lived for many years; and I should think that was true. She had much the appearance of a respectable servant. She only came here after he did, invited, it is supposed, by him, as it was an open secret he got a lot of her annuity out of her. Not long after I came she managed to get her hand badly crushed in a heavy mangle she was working, one of the old-fashioned sort. I was forced to take off two fingers at once, though I had doubts, from the first, as to the result. I do not know whether it was the result of her brother's exactions, or of her own penurious habits, but she was poorly nourished,

and had a bad constitution to start with. As I expected, gangrene came on, and she died. The annuity died with her, and Kelly was furious. He said I had murdered her, and ought to be put on trial, I had no business to have attempted such an operation on a woman of her age. Of course I never gave any attention to his ravings, but it chanced, some weeks after the woman's death, I went into The Miner's Rest one evening to see Mrs. Duncan, who was ill. She was much disturbed by my appearance, and told me Duncan was gone to Netherport about some business, and that Kelly was in the house, much the worse for drink—supplied to him somewhere else, of course—and raging furiously against me, his sense of personal injury inflamed by it being the first pay-day of his sister's annuity since her death. The poor woman seemed to be in such terror as to what would happen if he came across me that I thought it best to leave as soon as possible, and promised her I would slip out as quietly as I could. I suppose, however, someone was on the watch, for just as I got downstairs Kelly came lurching out of the taproom, with some comrades after him—to see fair play, I presume. He planted himself in the passage, and began to favour me with his opinion. Such a torrent of foul language I never heard, and I made a note then of some Edinburgh phrases not common in these parts. Of course I did not want to be mixed up in a disreputable public-house row, so I tried speaking quietly; but I saw it was no use. There was nothing for it but decisive measures.

For the poor woman, too, a short, sharp uproar would be better than a lengthened brawl; so I watched my chance, and caught him a tremendous blow between the eyes. He went over with a most appalling crash, and before he had time to recover I slipped past him, and out of the door. I have never seen him since, but I understand his sentiments towards me have not been ameliorated by the encounter."

The minister laughed. "Well," he said, "I thought when I first saw this place that it looked like a peaceful, secluded spot, where virtue might well flourish uncontaminated. But it seems to be a very up-to-date sort of Arcadia."

"It is a beastly hole," said Dr. Munro, with energy.

"But supposing it were the resting-place of all the virtues, would it be interesting for a medical man? I am afraid an exceedingly virtuous community is not the one in which medical practice is apt to be most interesting."

"It couldn't be worse than it is. What can one do here? It is very well for you. You can keep yourself abreast of the times by reading and study. But if by any chance I do get a case worth studying, I am forced to send it off to the cottage hospital in Netherport, because I cannot get it properly looked after here. So eye, ear, and hand alike get rusty."

"Yes, that is easily understood," the minister said. "But you are not very ancient. Fortune's wheel may turn up something for you yet."

"Perhaps," replied Dr. Munro, with a shade of

bitterness in his tone. "But it's ill waiting for dead men's shoes."

The remembrance of Mr. Mackenzie's warning, earlier in the evening, came back to Arthur Reid's mind, and prompted a quiet gliding away from the subject.

"Everyone knows where his own saddle galls," he said ; "and I suspect every saddle galls a little somewhere. But have you not an interesting case now, in your injured collier? He seems to be a very peculiar sort of individual."

"Yes, but very commonplace as a surgical case, at least as yet. Strumous, therefore to a physician there might be interesting points ; but surgery is my favourite branch. Of course, in such a case surgical features worth studying might arise, but they are not at present apparent. What people felicitously term 'mad doctors' might find him interesting. I should think he is far from sound mentally. A likely enough subject for monomania. Had he been a better educated man, I should expect him to break out as leader of some specially fanatical crusade against alcohol. You, I should think, might find him a useful study."

"I mean to see him as soon as possible," the minister said. "And now, seeing it is just on midnight, I think it is time we separated. I hope my parishioners will not report that on this, my first night in my new parish, I was seen going home in the small hours from The Miner's Rest."

"I will stand here with the lamp until you are well up the road," the doctor said, as they parted.

CHAPTER IV

A MODERATE DRINKER

NETHERPORT, though a thriving little place, was not held by the select circle of its inhabitants to be rich in social advantages. Its fashionable season was short, for some peculiarities of the coast rendered bathing enjoyable only for a few weeks at the height of the summer, and over ten months of dreary monotony were poorly atoned for by a few weeks' incursion of visitors whose desirability as acquaintances, or for the matter of that, as customers, was apt to be a very uncertain quantity. Mrs. Crosbie, the wife of the leading minister in Netherport, held very pronounced opinions on the subject. The sum total of the demerits of the place, in her estimation was succinctly expressed in her frequent asseveration, that it was the worst place in Scotland for any chance of getting girls creditably married.

As Mrs. Crosbie had only one daughter, a lively, popular girl of about twenty years of age when Arthur Reid secured the living of Glendarff, this special grievance, as far as she was personally concerned, might well seem to outsiders rather overestimated, or at least premature. But then

there were contributory circumstances naturally unknown to them. Dr. Crosbie was a man of very small private fortune, and the stipend of his living was but moderate. Besides the daughter there were three sons, the eldest of whom was fully five years her junior. The education of these sons, and their start in life, would represent a very heavy strain on income for a good many years to come, and during that time there would be little margin for the expenses attendant on securing a good position for Ellen in the matrimonial race, in which she was heavily handicapped by her very shadowy prospects of ever possessing any fortune. Had Netherport only been as some places to which Mrs. Crosbie's thoughts turned wistfully, Dr. Crosbie's position would have been worth a good deal. But where was the use of being leading minister in a place where there was socially so little worth leading? These thoughts cost Mrs. Crosbie many anxious, sleepless hours, and much harassing study of ways and means, in hope of screwing out a small surplus here and there which might be devoted to temporary exportation of her daughter on visits to more favoured localities.

The anxieties of a mother are certainly deserving of sympathy, even when they be those of a commonplace woman, who, confining her projects for her daughter solely within the limits of matrimony, has allowed her education to go by the board, with a view to more lavish expenditure on that of the sons, who cannot be matrimonially established in life, and who sees that daughter reach womanhood with matrimony still below the

horizon, and deficient in all educational qualifications for taking her place in the struggle of life. But the laws which govern the spiritual world are unfortunately as wholly callous to sympathetic sentiment as are those which rule the material world, and are apt to work out with cold, mechanical precision their natural result, that such anxieties lend dangerous force to temptations of an insidious character.

Mr. Duff's imposing mansion of Craigmore, though situated in the parish of Glendarff, was much nearer to Netherport than to the village, and the town had also the advantage of being much easier of access. He had therefore always been in the habit of going to church in Netherport, when he always sat in the minister's pew, a spacious enclosure, poorly filled by Mrs. Crosbie and her four children. This practice of Mr. Duff's had been, from the first, a cause of some offence. Many of Dr. Crosbie's parishioners, especially those who had no chance of acquaintance with a man of somewhat eccentric character, in whom penuriousness and liberality were curiously mixed, and who was subject to intermittent freaks of making rather costly presents, lamented the grave indiscretion which allowed any intimacy between a minister's family and a man of doubtful character, between an ardent advocate of total abstinence and a distiller. Dr. Crosbie's influence in this latter respect had certainly been somewhat shaken by the acquaintance, and Mrs. Gillespie, the uncompromising widowed superintendent of the Convalescent Home, who admitted she rode at

single anchor, and that the snapping of her conviction that total abstinence was a fundamental principle of Christianity would allow her to drift helplessly away on the ocean of general negation, had boldly taken him to task.

"It cannot be right, my dear Dr. Crosbie—with all respect I say it—it *cannot* be right for you to be at all intimate with that man. His character, you know"—and she shook her head with awful import. "And then—a distiller! A man who actually manufactures that vile poison which we know ought to be stamped out of all existence! You would not associate with a murderer, and what is that man but a wholesale murderer—a murderer of souls as well as of bodies?"

Some twinges of conscience on the subject of this arch enemy of all the principles he so strenuously upheld had already visited Dr. Crosbie. But justification of the time-honoured attempt to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds is generally not far to seek. And at the moment the very vehemence of his mentor placed a weapon in his hands to use against herself. He replied, with all the ponderous suavity which was habitual with him—

"Gently, gently, my dear madam. We must not let even our most cherished convictions carry us too far. It does not do to found action on what is, after all, mere current rumour, and we must always distinguish carefully between sin and sinners. The bitter hostility which is our bounden duty towards the former, would be unchristian to the last degree if exhibited towards the latter.

Nor must we judge all men by the same standard. I fear any man brought up from childhood in close association with the liquor traffic, and taught to regard it as a thoroughly legitimate source of income, is little likely in his later years to recognise its true character."

His arguments only convinced Mrs. Gillespie that a comparatively late conversion to a right view of this momentous question had left much to be desired in the minister himself. But little did either he or she dream of the awful depravity of the thoughts which, as it were, drop by drop, were mingling with and adulterating the purity of his wife's sentiments on the subject. From the date of his first arrival at Craigmore, when Ellen was a merry, laughing child of eight years old, Mr. Duff had taken much notice of her. He had presented her with gorgeously-bound children's books, and as she grew older, with one or two really handsome ornaments, until by degrees the mother's appreciation of his generosity to the rapidly developing girl had become mingled with visions, most entirely speculative, she assured herself, of what might have been, had he been a man of different character. His fortune was princely; Craigmore was a lovely place, and its somewhat incongruous establishment, redundant in some directions, gravely deficient in others, sadly needed judicious supervision. Ellen had many qualities fitting her to be the wife of a man much older than herself, and a wealthily married sister would be as great an advantage to the boys as a daughter in such a position, close at hand, would be delightful to Dr.

Crosbie and herself. Sad that it could not possibly be. There, for a time, her musings had been wont to end with a sigh; but as years rolled on they began to trail a string of questions after them. Could Mr. Duff really be so old as people said he was? Symptoms of greater juvenility were at least evident to her: and was there really so much against his character as was supposed? She yielded to none in the staunchness of her devotion to total abstinence principle, and must ever deeply regret Mr. Duff's commercial relations to the liquor traffic. Still, she was bound to allow there was a great deal of bitterness and uncharitable feeling among the adherents of the creed. Possibly a great deal said against Mr. Duff was maliciously slanderous. Should not Christian charity render us very slow of crediting evil reports of anyone? That these musings should gradually lose the hue of interrogation, and take on that of conviction, was as natural as that the subtle change should wholly escape the perceptions of a strongly biassed mind. By the time Ellen Crosbie had actually entered her twenty-first year, the process of transmutation was pretty fairly accomplished. Eligible aspirants for her hand were still conspicuous by absence, and it would be many years yet before the boys were all off their hands. By that time Ellen might still possess endearing qualities, but her mother candidly admitted to herself her external attractiveness would be gone with the freshness of youth. She grew more cordial towards Mr. Duff, more vigilant in keeping out of the house ineligible striplings of philandering tendencies.

She had never ventured to reveal these inward questionings to her husband, but she had of late enlarged a good deal to her daughter on the broad tolerance due towards men whose early surroundings had been prejudicial to the growth of high-toned morality; and the girl did sometimes wonder, with a sense of some inconsistency in the position, that she should be sharply admonished to avoid as much as possible a certain good-looking young clerk in one of the banks, because his father was a wine and spirit merchant,—not a very successful one, and burdened with a large family,—while Mr. Duff was always cordially welcomed to the house. But she was a contented, bright-spirited lassie, and did not greatly trouble herself with ponderings over perplexing questions.

The advent of Arthur Reid gave a fresh hue to Mrs. Crosbie's musings. The possession of a second string to your bow has always a tendency to lessen any exaggerated estimate of the value of the first; and this might prove to be a most serviceable second string. To do Mrs. Crosbie justice, she would certainly have preferred to see her daughter married to a young minister of unimpeachable character and undoubted ability, rather than to even a wealthy old man of doubtful reputation, and she was quite prepared to accord to the new-comer the position of first string, if the financial difficulties of the situation could be successfully overcome. But the young candidate had spoken far too frankly to Dr. Crosbie of his reasons for wishing to secure the appointment not to make her perfectly aware that from that

point of view he was in no position to occupy the more prominent place. As second string, however, he might, in the first instance, be usefully applied as a test of the old man's sentiments, and if they turned out to be strictly paternal in character, then, as sole string, the younger man might be turned to excellent account in, indirectly, carving out his own good fortune. Mr. Duff had often said that as far as he knew he had not a single living relative in the world, and he had always shown a marked preference for Ellen. If the sadness of her fate in being sundered from the beloved and estimable man of her choice by mere want of fortune were duly impressed upon him, what more probable than that he would dower the portionless girl, with additional satisfaction in thus aiding to settle her in a position to be a daughter to him in his old age?

The natural outcome of these meditations, mere castles in the air, she always assured herself, was that on the occasion of Dr. Crosbie's first visit to the new-comer, he carried to Glendarff an invitation to dine the following day at Netherport manse. "And that, you know, means sleeping there," he added. "You cannot cross the hill at night, and we don't ask our friends to drive ten miles home after dining with us."

The young minister received from Mrs. Crosbie an effusive welcome, which rather surprised her daughter, more conversant with the outcome than with the motives of her mother's tactics. Sheer necessity kept her pretty closely tied to Netherport, where the quiet refinement of manner due to

mental cultivation, united with a lofty tone of moral sentiment, were not more common than certain superficial advantages due to the superiority of urban tailors and barbers over rural ones. The genial tone of Dr. Crosbie's mind had exercised a very favourable influence on sectarian feeling in Netherport, and the ministers of the various denominations associated in a very friendly manner. Both the Free Church and United Presbyterian ministers were guests at the manse that evening, and the girl drew many contrasts, rejoicing with more loyalty to her Church than soundness of deduction over the superiority of the Established Church minister's appearance.

"I had hoped we should have had your leading heritor to meet you here to-night, Mr. Reid," the host remarked, during a momentary pause in dinner-table chat. "But he has been absent from home, and only returns late this evening. I mean, of course, Mr. Duff. You have not met him, I suppose?"

"No, I have not."

"Ah, well," continued Dr. Crosbie, speaking with a little hesitation under the consciousness that Mrs. Gillespie, who was one of the guests, was listening critically to his utterances, "he is rather more a member of my congregation than of yours. That hill road is a terrible barrier between you and him. But you must keep him up to his duties, you know. He can quite well afford to be liberal in two parishes, and he can be liberal when he chooses, though he is an eccentric sort of man, on whom you can never quite surely count.

If you can manage to take him the right way, you may get a good deal out of him."

"I am not likely to put his liberality to the test," replied Arthur Reid. "He may keep his money for me."

"Eh, how?" asked the puzzled host. "I don't quite take your meaning."

"I mean that I think his wealth singularly ill-gotten. If he offers aid for parochial schemes, I am not authorised to refuse it; but I had rather be without it, and shall certainly never make an application to him. The responsibilities resting on the land he has purchased, he must, of course, be called on to fulfil."

Mrs. Gillespie straightened herself up with compressed lips and an unmistakable gesture of offence. In answer to an urgent personal appeal, Mr. Duff had lately presented her with a cheque for fifty pounds, for the benefit of the Home. She had been at the time a little puzzled by a certain air of mockery he had assumed in so doing. Mr. Reid's remarks threw an exceedingly unpleasant light upon the possible cause.

"That seems to me a far-fetched and most uncharitable view of the subject," she replied, with considerable asperity. "If the man is conscious he is the possessor of ill-gotten gains, and wishes to make amends by devoting his money to commendable purposes, what right has anyone to prevent him?"

"Absolutely none. But if he expressed that sentiment, I should claim the right of suggesting, as a more suitable method of making amends, his

withdrawal from all connection with a traffic with which, I believe, he is still intimately connected."

"Oh, of course," put in the host, cheered by finding his sails set to the same breeze as Mrs. Gillespie's, yet a little alarmed at her evident loss of temper. "That is the highest possible view of such a question. But in the meantime, my young friend, I think your sentiments are rather exaggerated."

"Well," replied the younger minister, with a smile, "exaggeration is the privilege of youth, is it not? Perhaps as I grow older I shall gain more capacity for prudent discrimination. At the present moment, I confess, the question seems to me on all fours with putting into the treasury the price of blood. If that fellow Martin, who you will remember got a large sum, a few years since, for giving the information which hanged the murderer of Mr. Dawson, had offered you out of it a handsome donation towards building a church, would you have accepted it?"

"No," replied Dr. Crosbie. "But then, you know," he added, clutching wildly at the favourite crutch of the ethically illogical, "we have scriptural authority to guide us on that point."

"And have we none to guide us in the case of a man who heaps up riches on the moral ruin of his fellow-creatures? His case is surely worse than that of a man who brings a murderer to justice?"

Mrs. Gillespie seemed to be about to speak. But at sight of her flushed face and angry eyes Mrs. Crosbie hastily struck in—

"Well, really, I must say, I cannot understand your position, Mr. Reid. I am told you are not a total abstainer."

"No, I am not."

"Yet you strongly condemn the man who produces the thing you use. It seems to me most inconsistent."

"Perhaps it is. But Dr. Crosbie has reminded you I am young. Maybe with advancing years I shall gain more light upon the subject."

"I am sure I hope so," said Mrs. Gillespie, with emphasis. "Meantime, I should like to know what you would say supposing Mr. Duff did come and consult you as to the best way of making amends, with the money he has actually realised, for having made it in an unjustifiable way. What would you recommend him to do with it? I presume," she added, with the light of assured triumph in her eyes, "you would not counsel him to turn it into gold, and take it out and sink it in the sea?"

"Well, he might do worse. The Rhine was once found very useful in such a case, you know."

But Mrs. Gillespie didn't know. She had only an angry suspicion he was laughing at her. "You haven't answered my question," she said tartly.

"My imagination isn't strong enough," he replied, with a quiver of a smile about his lips, "to let me get a firm hold of such an improbable case. But I hope I should have diffidence enough to consult older and more experienced men than myself on so difficult a point."

"You don't seem to care much for anyone's opinion of the question of total abstinence," she

retorted. "I should like to know how otherwise than as a total abstainer you purpose to fight the drink fiend in your parish. But perhaps you intend to let it, like Mr. Duff, severely alone."

"I have been the legally appointed minister of Glendarff for a very short time. I have not had time to examine into its requirements as yet."

Mrs. Gillespie muttered something in an angry undertone about "quibbling"; and Mrs. Crosbie, hastily rising, put an end to the discussion.

"Have you made acquaintance with any of your parishioners yet?" Dr. Crosbie asked, when the momentary stir had subsided.

"Only with the Mackenzies and Dr. Munro."

"Ah, good sort of men. We rather envy you that doctor. He is a clever fellow, and a very good surgeon. That is rather a weak point with us. We are well enough off with physicians, but for any surgical work I would rather trust Munro than any of them. You haven't been at Glendyne, then?"

"Not yet."

"You'll not get much out of old Davidson. A strange, dour sort of old fellow; and his daughter is nearly as strange—an odd, shy sort of girl. I almost doubt if she has ever been away from that place in her life. Her mother, I have always heard, was a very strange person—the only daughter of Dr. Simpson's predecessor. She married rather late in life, and died when her daughter was almost an infant."

In the drawing-room Mrs. Gillespie had vented

her excited feelings by an energetic onslaught on the young minister.

"The most conceited young prig I have met for a long time," she declared.

"Certainly his opinions are most extraordinary," said Mrs. Crosbie, not a little disturbed herself at Arthur Reid's uncompromising attitude with regard to Mr. Duff's money.

"Opinions? My dear Mrs. Crosbie, he hasn't got any. Did you not observe how he shirked the subject when I pressed him home? People say he is very clever, but I don't believe it. I believe he is just one of the smart, flippant young men so common now, who get a name for being clever by rattling off flighty sermons very fluently. Such men always delight in airing very extravagant opinions."

"I am sure I hope he is not one of that class," replied Mrs. Crosbie fervently. "There are a great many—too many of them—in the Church now. Fluent chatter is everything in these days. Dr. Crosbie long since foretold the abolition of patronage would bring these men to the front."

Arthur Reid retired to his bed that night little dreaming of the turmoil he had aroused. Mrs. Gillespie sat up into the small hours discussing his enormities with her assistant.

"It is the audacity of it fairly staggers me," she said. "The idea of that man, who is himself that abomination, a moderate drinker, taking up such an exaggerated tone! The thought fairly takes one's breath away."

"I suppose he has found audacity pay. It does

answer in big towns, no doubt, just like other impostures. But he will not find it pay here, I suspect. People are more easily seen through in the country than amidst the bustle of a big town."

At the manse the domestic confidences took a somewhat different tone. "I must allow," Dr. Crosbie said to his wife, "I was somewhat impressed by his remarks. Less by the opinions, than by the fact that he, who is not even a total abstainer, should, to some extent, take up a higher position than we, who are pledged to a war of extermination against the traffic. It seems rather remarkable."

"My dear," remonstrated his wife, "how can you, with your age and experience, be so easily taken in by lofty sentiments that cost nothing? Mr. Reid clearly does not choose to sacrifice a thing he likes for the welfare of others, so he adroitly assumes a very lofty tone of sentiment which costs him nothing. We are little likely to see his opinions put to the test; but did such a thing happen as his succeeding to a large fortune made by the liquor traffic, I suspect you would very soon find out what his high-flown notions are worth. It is very easy to be high-minded about matters which make no personal difference to yourself."

CHAPTER V

A LOST HAT

ARTHUR REID was gently lectured the following morning by Mrs. Crosbie on the subject of his sentiments towards Mr. Duff, who possessed, she assured him, many good qualities, although, of course, there was much about him it was impossible not gravely to regret. Then the minister was handed over to Ellen, to be by her introduced to such lions as Netherport afforded, during a temporary business engagement of his host; and after luncheon Dr. Crosbie himself convoyed him to a point from which he could clearly indicate to him the path over the hill towards Glendarff. "You cannot make a mistake," the doctor said. "There is but the one path. That is Craigmores, that house away to the left, on the slope of the hill."

Arthur Reid slowly climbed the easy, gradual ascent of the seaward slope of the range beyond which lay his future home, and when he had nearly reached the huge projecting rock behind which lay the Witches' Pass, he paused, and turned to admire the panorama spread out before him. From the altitude he had reached he commanded a fine bird's-eye view of the house and grounds at Craig-

more. It was truly a place to excite the envy of any man—a situation of almost unique beauty, whether for splendour of distant prospect, or for picturesque character of the ground immediately surrounding the house. Yet, as the young minister stood gazing on the scene, in all its summer beauty, there gradually rose before him other visions—scenes from his old home in a crowded city parish. Dwellings, hideous in their squalor and uncleanness; grimy, brutalised men, with every evil passion that can befoul a human soul depicted on their crime-marked faces; debased, unsexed women, with tangled hair and tattered clothing; miserable, half-starved children, shivering in rags; and a heavy, polluted air, which seemed as if its waves were never stirred by other sounds than those of blasphemy or obscenity. And that stately mansion, with its velvet lawns, its carefully tended shrubberies, its ample gardens and well-filled hothouses, its stately timber, and splendid outlook over land and sea, was it not the price of all that wretchedness and destitution—bought with the wreck and ruin of human lives, maintained with the cost of their ever deeper down-thrusting in the mire of sin and misery? He turned away at last with almost a shudder, muttering to himself, “The price of blood were a less foul thing,” and pursued his way at a more rapid pace.

A few strides brought him within the weird gloom of the Witches’ Pass, and his thoughts were turned to interested observation of the strange rendings and distortions of the violently riven rocks. He had nearly reached the northern

exit from the pass when his eyes fell upon a very unwonted sight. On a fragment of rock, immediately beyond its narrow precincts, was seated a man, who appeared to be well enough dressed, but whose head was enveloped in a coloured handkerchief. Even at the distance from which the minister first caught a sight of him, he did not look like a man who should be under any difficulty in procuring a suitable covering for his head, and a nearer approach increased the strangeness of the spectacle. His dress was a well-made morning suit of tweed of excellent quality; his boots were certainly of an expensive kind; and his strange headgear was a rather costly specimen of those silk pocket-handkerchiefs often in favour with elderly men. That an elderly and otherwise well-dressed man should be sitting on a summer afternoon beside a mountain path with his head tied up in a silk handkerchief suggested eccentricity, and observing that there were no signs of illness or any accident about him, the minister was preparing to pass without taking any notice of him. But the stranger had quite other intentions.

"Hi, young man!" he exclaimed, "just you come here, will you? Oh," he added, as the clerical dress appeared to catch his eye, "I suppose you're the new minister of Glendarff, ain't you?"

"Yes, I am," replied the minister, rather amused.

"I thought as much. Well, anyway, you're a young man, and I ain't. I want you to do something for me."

"What is that?"

"Do you see my hat, down there?" and he

pointed to a deep gully close to where he was seated. "Well, I want you to go down and get it for me. I was stooping to get some water out of the spring here, in the cup of my flask, and I knocked my hat off against a projection of rock. It rolled down into that beastly place before I could stop it. I ain't much given to scrambling, and don't care to go after it. I've been sitting here some time. I thought somebody would likely come by soon."

"I will get the hat for you, with pleasure," the minister replied, beginning his descent as he spoke. It was no very serious enterprise for an active young man; but a good deal of jagged rock and a good deal of loose shale would certainly have rendered the attempt a hazardous one for an elderly man, unused to mountaineering.

"Thank you, thank you," said the stranger, as Arthur Reid returned to his side, hat in hand; and he proceeded to remove the handkerchief and replace its proper covering on a bald head, surrounded by a fringe of scanty, grizzled hair. "You see I know who you are," he said, "but I expect you haven't any notion who I am."

"I suspect your knowledge was a mere guess, and I think I can guess as accurately. You are Mr. Duff."

"Right you are, and your principal heritor. I suppose I shall have to pay handsomely for your services. No end of doing up of the manse, and Lord knows what. It's expensive work being helped by a gentleman. If you'd been a collier, I'd have got off with a shilling."

"And now you'll get off without even paying a shilling," replied the young minister coldly. "You'll not be asked to do a single thing you wouldn't have been required to do if I had never seen you. You'll only have to take your share of the general obligation of the heritors."

"And how much do you suppose that is? About four-fifths of the whole amount."

"I daresay. That is your own affair. I suppose you knew the obligations you took upon yourself when you bought the property."

"You are very tart, young man. You would be wiser to be a little more agreeable to the only rich man in your parish."

"I don't in the least care whether you are rich or poor. You should not make offensive insinuations."

"What offensive insinuation did I make?"

"That I should ground some claim upon you on the mere fact of my having rendered you a paltry service."

"Oh, that was only a joke."

"Well, if that is your idea of joking, I should advise you to drop the practice."

The old man looked at him with a mocking smile.

"You've been hearing what a dreadful old sinner I am. That's the reason you're so mighty cool. You were dining at old Crosbie's last night, I know. They asked me to come. I suppose they told you I should have been there if I'd been home in time, didn't they?"

"They seemed to think so."

"Catch me! They generally dine early, and I

sometimes lunch there. I'm a privileged person. I take a little flask in my pocket and dilute the soda-water. I tell her it's for my stomach's sake. That's in the Bible, you know, so she can't say anything. That does well enough for luncheon; but catch me dining there! I say, what did they all drink?"

"Cold water mostly, I think. But there were other things. I drank soda-water."

"Lord save us! Imagine washing down your dinner with a bellyful of cold water! I should feel as if my stomach was plugged up with snow for an hour afterwards."

The minister could not but laugh. "Well, I must confess," he said, "I should have preferred a glass of sherry myself."

"What! Are you not one of them?"

"I'm not a total abstainer."

"You'll be in no favour down there, then. It's different for me. I'm a rich man. They've plenty to say about me, and the souls I ruin, and the curse that's sure to come to *me* with my money. All the same, they're after me like a set of hungry leeches to get as much of it as they can out of me for their own purposes. There's that old harpy at the Home. She wrote me a begging letter a yard long last week. I didn't read it, but I gave her fifty pounds, just for the joke of the thing."

"No, did you?" exclaimed the minister, with a sudden laugh.

"I did. Why do you laugh?"

"Because of some remarks made at dinner yesterday. I understand their effect better now."

A LOST HAT

"She's a regular old fanatic that. I believe she thinks a man might play havoc with the whole Commandments and yet go straight to the devil. Only he never drank a drop of anything stronger than tea. They're always messing with slops. And it's all rot, all round. They do a bit of good."

"You'll not get any unprejudiced people to believe you there. The wisdom of their ways may be called in question, but everyone who's worked in big towns knows they have done good. The bare fact of people showing themselves willing to make a personal sacrifice because they believe it will benefit others must do some good."

"Oh yes. No doubt it's a substantial gain to your credit in your account with Heaven. But as for practical good, I tell you, they do none. They get a lot of sober, quiet people to give up the glass of sherry or spirits, and here and there they catch and reform a few of just those drunkards that would have reformed some other way if they'd never been heard of. That's about all they do, except prepare fine old times for us in the future. If you've any money to invest, you might put it into the liquor traffic."

"Why?"

"Why? Why, because the pendulum's bound to swing back just as far one way as it swayed the other. There'll be a fine reaction one of these days. They're busy cramming their heads with nonsense down the throats of small boys now, getting them to sign the pledge before they understand what the words mean."

children never like wine, and they think it a fine thing to renounce it, and strut about as virtuous little prigs. But just wait a while. You may see the results beginning to appear already. Look at the number of mere boys you'll see drunk about the streets now on a holiday. That wasn't the case when I was young. It's just the swing of the pendulum. There'll be fine times for drink-sellers in the course of another generation."

The minister was silent, partly in angry disgust, partly in a sort of pained questioning how much of truth there might be in the old man's words. He had been studying his face while they talked. It was an evil one, cruel, hard, sensual, with keen, watchful eyes that seemed never at rest. But there was much shrewdness in it. "You don't believe that, I suppose?" he said, after a moment's pause, finding his listener did not speak.

"No, I don't. At least, not altogether. There may be some truth mixed up with it. But I cannot stay longer talking. I have business to attend to at home."

"No, but, I say, don't go. I like talking to you. Come home and dine with me."

"No, thank you. It is quite impossible. I must get home. Time is slipping away fast, and I have much to do."

"Well, but wait half a minute. Look here. As you have sense enough to keep clear of all this total-abstaining! humbug,—and, mind you, the better part of them suck in their drink like winking when they can do it on the sly,—I'll stock your cellar for you. I'll send you in stuff, both

wine and spirits, you needn't fear to set before a king."

Then the minister turned sharply upon him. "You'll do nothing of the kind," he said shortly. "I loathe your traffic, and I'll have none of the profits. What wine and spirits I choose to have, I'll buy for myself. I'll accept nothing from you."

With a short good-afternoon, he turned on his heel. The old man looked after him with an evil smile. "So ho, young high-flyer!" he muttered, "that's your high mightiness's little game, is it? See if I don't make you dance to a different tune before I've done with you."

So much irritated by this interview with his leading heritor that he felt angry with himself for the extent of that irritation, Arthur Reid strode down the hill toward Glendarff, turning his steps, when he reached the valley, in the direction of Glendyne. What further disturbance of his moral and mental equilibrium might that visit have in store for him, he wondered? A strange contrast the place presented to the beautiful home of the old distiller, bathed in the brilliant summer sunshine, and fanned by cool breezes, crisp with the salt breath of the mighty ocean! The house at Glendyne, a substantial but decayed-looking building, stood back in a shallow amphitheatre, at the very foot of the precipitous hills he had just descended, and was further shadowed by the gloomy pine woods fringing their lower slopes. The slow but steady progress of ruin born of neglect was everywhere apparent. The gate which should have closed the entrance to the private

road stood wide open, far too frail a structure to incline anyone to risk the possible consequences of an attempt to close it. The road, a stony, rut-scored track in summer, a series of muddy puddles in winter, was the fitting approach to a bridge spanning a small mountain burn which ran close past the house. It was so dilapidated in structure that no one could remember it being crossed by any wheeled vehicle more important than a wheelbarrow. Even the antiquated old chaise in which Mr. and Miss Davidson occasionally journeyed to the station or Netherport always halted on the farther side, finding its way to the stables by a circuitous route over a stout wood and turf bridge intended for the use of farm-carts. Immediately beyond the bridge, on the right-hand side of the road, a rusty iron gate, between solid but mouldy stone pillars, surmounted with mossgrown stone balls, imparted an air of yet lingering importance to what had once been a well-kept walled garden, where now a few aged apple and plum trees reared their battered remnants over a waste of straggling, unpruned gooseberry, currant, and raspberry bushes, and some neglected patches of kail, cabbages, and potatoes. A few hardy flowers still struggled for dear life with a mass of choking weeds along the margins of the slimy, mossgrown paths. About fifty yards beyond the garden gate stood the house, a plot of tangled grass in front, on which grew a superannuated laburnum and a few tottering hawthorns; behind, apparently, farm offices, and some scattered planes and beeches. As he approached the house the dismal tones of an

aged piano, feebly responding to the efforts of no very skilful fingers to draw from it the inspiring strains of a lively reel, brought back to the minister's mind that there was a daughter, there young in years, at least. Could anyone be young in aught else, under pressure of that universal burden of decaying old age? When by a vigorous effort he had heaved into motion the rusty door-knocker, it almost seemed as if response would most suitably have come from a galvanised corpse.

The opening of the door, however, somewhat amended the situation. The hall was bare and gloomy, but it was clean and tidy, and there was nothing of gloom about the woman who stood in the open doorway. She was an elderly, rather hard-featured woman, but very neat in her dress, and wearing a bright, intelligent expression. Her face lighted up with a smile as she saw who was the visitor.

"Come awa' in, sir," she said. "The laird's no' in the house, but he's no' far off. He's just out by, lookin' to the branchin' o' a wheen trees."

She led the way to the room from whence came the twang of doubtful harmony, saying, as she opened the door, "Here's the minister, Miss Aggie." The ancient instrument subsided into silence, and the arouser of its dismal efforts came forward to meet the visitor. She was certainly not attractive in appearance, though her figure was good, and her shapely limbs were well proportioned. She was very pale, with the muddy paleness of a colourless, sallow complexion. Her hair, of a neutral brown tint, was singularly de-

void of light and shade, and her pale blue eyes were very expressionless. Her features, otherwise fairly good, were marred by a certain coarseness about the mouth. She did not appear to be positively shy, but she returned the minister's greeting with the listless manner of a person not greatly prone to interest herself in anything. "Please sit down," she said. "Father will be in directly." Then she seated herself on the sofa, with, it seemed, little intention of arousing herself to any further conversational effort.

"Heaven grant he may come soon," the minister mentally ejaculated, with a despairing glance around, in search of some topic of discourse. The circumstances were not such as admitted of any delay. Silence, if not instantly and resolutely fought, would rapidly overwhelm one in depths as of the primeval deluge. His eye fell on the piano.

"I am afraid I interrupted your music," he said. "I heard you were a musician. Dempster was telling me you used to play the harmonium in church."

"Yes, I did play it, but not for very long. The choir were so nasty and disagreeable. If anything went wrong, they always tried to make out it was my fault. One night there was quite a row, so I would not play any more."

"I hope that decision is not irrevocable. I have been thinking we might perhaps start the choir again, on a better footing."

"Oh, but I could never undertake to play again for all those horrid singers, they were so rude."

"I do not mean to give any of them a chance of singing again. I was thinking of a choir of children from the school. Children's voices, if well trained, make a very good lead for the simple singing in a country church; and I would undertake to attend the practisings regularly myself."

Then a faint flicker of animation did pass over her face.

"Yes," she said, "I think that would be much nicer. I would not mind trying with a choir of children."

"Very well. I will put the matter in train as soon as I can get the harmonium looked over and put in thorough order. What evening would suit you best for practising?" he asked, wildly forestalling circumstances, in his dread of letting this, his one conversational prop, collapse.

"Oh, all nights are the same to me," she said. "I never have anything to do." And at this supreme moment her father entered.

His appearance did not greatly aid the position. The old man clearly regarded the minister as a sort of natural enemy to the heritor, a malignant being crammed to exploding point with all sorts of wild projects, calculated to involve heritors in ruinous outlay. His adroitness in twisting every remark made by the minister into an opportunity for dwelling on the exceptionally excellent state of repair of both manse and church, spoke much for his ingenuity, but did not exactly help the flow of conversation. Yes, it was grand weather for changing house. It would be a great pity if it had been very wet, and a house all so clean

and in good order as the manse to get damaged with bringing in of wet packages. A deal of mischief was soon done that way to paint and paper. Was the church large enough for the parish? Oh, quite large enough. Indeed, since they'd spent such a lot of money, just two years ago, in doing it all up, and altering some of the old big pews, there were really more seats than were needed. And there was a grand stove. It was fine and warm in the winter, and the church kept that dry it would not want a thing done to it for years to come.

Rarely had the unfortunate minister passed a more exhausting half-hour than that he spent at Glendyne, and when at last he found himself re-crossing the dilapidated bridge, he was wondering greatly how Munro could stand either the father or the daughter.

CHAPTER VI

THAT BLESSED WORD "HYSTERIA"

THESE first interviews of the young minister with his principal heritors could hardly be held to be of a very encouraging character. They did not seem to promise him much enlightened and trustworthy lay help in carrying on the work of the church in Glendarff. Neither was his first visit in a more strictly professional character fruitful in any promising suggestiveness. He took the earliest opportunity allowed by a number of small details of settling down, which required his attention, to pay a visit to John Millroy, the man of whom he had heard such curious particulars at the manager's house.

"He's just a particular quiet body," his old landlady said, in answer to the minister's inquiries. "He just lies the hale day an' says scarce a word to onybody. Whiles I think there's a sort o' a want about him. I doubt ye'll nae be gettin' ower much out o' him, sir."

The injured man received the minister with an air of the strictest neutrality, and as Mr. Reid sat beside him, manfully grappling the difficulty of carrying on a sustained conversation, consisting, on

one side, of purely monosyllabic replies to every question or remark, he had plenty of opportunity of studying the sufferer's face; for he seemed purposely to avoid looking at his visitor. It was a gloomy, sinister one, with what the minister said to himself were most correctly described as smouldering eyes, so dull and dreamy were they, yet at the same time so suggestive of possibilities of sullen fury. But his curt replies were civil enough in tone, only they came at times very slowly, as if his thoughts were wandering, or the remarks took a long time to make any distinct impression on his brain. By dint of sheer force of direct interrogation the minister ascertained that his shoulder and arm were "gey sore whiles," and turning or moving at all caused him much pain in his side, but that otherwise he was fairly comfortable. Mr. Mackenzie and Mr. Alan were very kind, and Mrs. Aitken looked well after him. He wanted for nothing.

Determined not to be baffled, Arthur Reid held his ground, deeming it possible the man's cautious reserve was due to a dread he was going to be preached at, and prayed for, without much reference to his own wishes on the subject. Certainly, as the minister resolutely chatted on, over a variety of local topics, his somewhat sullen coldness seemed to thaw a little, and once or twice a faint ghost of a smile flickered over his face for a moment.

"Well, Millroy," Mr. Reid said, when at length he rose to leave, "am I to come and see you again?"

"If ye please to do so, sir."

"No, it's as you please. I must say, man, it is uncommonly hard to judge whether you would rather one came or stayed away. Every man's house is his castle, you know, and a minister has no more right than anyone else to thrust himself in upon anyone who doesn't want to see him."

Then for the first time the man looked him full in the face, and spoke a few consecutive sentences. "I'll be glad to see you, sir, but ye maun please no' to tak' it amiss that I dinna say much. I'm nae great hand at talkin', an' indeed it's no' as easy for me as ye might think. I had a sair tumble as a laddie, an' got an awful bang on the heid, an' soon after I was near to losin' words a'thegither. Whiles, now, I've a difficulty in findin' the word I want, an' it mak's me blate o' much speakin'."

"Now, I wonder if that is true," Dr. Munro said, to whom, meeting him in the village, Arthur Reid related what had passed. "If I can get him to let me feel his head, I'll soon find out. Such a blow as that might account for a good many of his oddities. Sometimes I have a half-suspicion about that fellow."

"That he is an impostor?"

"Not exactly. But that he is to some extent acting a part; that he wishes to be thought very stupid, and could be a good deal more wide awake if he chose. Only motive seems to be so wholly wanting."

"The foreman at the pits can tell you what are his capacities for being wide awake," the minister said. "I was asking him about that knife business. He says Millroy generally does go about as if he

was half asleep, but on that occasion he was about as wide awake as a tiger that smells blood. The foreman does not like having him about the pits. He wants Mr. Mackenzie to get rid of him."

"They will be rid of him for a time. That shoulder is going to be a more troublesome business than I expected."

"Going to turn out an interesting case?"

"Far from it, only a tedious one, as is common with those bad constitutions. He'll have to be off work for a good while, and I suspect he won't be able for anything heavy for some months. That left arm will be weak for a long time. Are you going up to the church?" he asked, as his companion paused at the road leading in that direction.

"Yes. There is a fellow there looking over the harmonium. I want to know what he says about it."

"Ah, I heard you were thinking of getting up a choir again. I am glad of it. She has rather a dismal time over there, poor girl," and he made a motion in the direction of Glendyne. "Even a little occupation of that kind will be a diversion for her."

It was not the first time Dr. Munro's words had seemed to imply he took it for granted the minister understood he had some personal interest in Agnes Davidson. As he spoke, Arthur Reid, who was just turning away, wheeled suddenly round and asked rather abruptly—

"Are you engaged to Miss Davidson, Munro?"

"Of course. I thought you knew that."

"I had heard something of it, but how could I

tell whether it was anything more than gossip? Who is there for people to marry her to save you and Alan Mackenzie? But if you do mean to marry her, why in Heaven's name don't you do it at once? I wouldn't leave a woman I cared about in that gloomy den for six weeks, if I could help it. It is enough to develop melancholia."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "My dear fellow," he said, "I have neither your manse nor your stipend. How could I ask her to come and live with me in lodgings, on the splendid emoluments of this magnificent practice? It is horribly depressing for her to be always shut up there with those old people; but what can I do?"

"Surely her father would do something for her?"

"So likely—the old brute! You'll learn to know him a good deal better before you've done with him, I suspect, my dear Reid. He cares for no one in the world but himself, and his one passion is grinding and screwing. He doesn't want Agnes to marry. It suits him better she should stay at home. I don't believe, if her life was at stake, he would give her a five-pound note to enable her to marry. No, as I said, it's a case of waiting for dead men's shoes. And we don't really know quite what we are waiting for then. Agnes has not the faintest idea what her father's pecuniary position is. She thinks he must have money laid by, but he is as close as the Sphinx. Of course there is the house and land."

"And which, I wonder, holds you in thrall, the woman or the property?" queried the minister to

himself, as he walked up to the church. Dr. Munro was lively, energetic, and ambitious. If he married a dull, unprepossessing girl like Agnes Davidson, merely to possess himself of her fortune, there were evil times in store for both.

The report on the harmonium being satisfactory, and the school children proving, on examination, a fairly trustworthy quantity in the question of a church choir, Arthur Reid betook himself a few days later to Glendyne, to settle preliminaries with Miss Davidson. The door was opened as usual by Mr. Davidson's trusty housekeeper, Margaret Kissock. But on this occasion the smiling welcome she was wont to accord to the minister was awanting. She looked grave, and her face wore a rather harassed expression.

"Is Miss Davidson at home?" Mr. Reid asked.

"Yes, sir, she is in. But she's no' just vera weel the day."

"I am sorry to hear it," said the minister. "I wanted to speak to her about the choir. I can call another day."

"Hae ye settled about that, minister?" the woman asked rather anxiously.

"I think so. If Miss Davidson can take the harmonium."

Mrs. Kissock appeared to hesitate for a moment. "Miss Agnes is geyly set on that, sir," she said, "and it wad do her a power o' gude. Just come yer ways in, an' I'll see what she's doing. Ye see she's no' just vera stout," she added, as she conducted the minister to the sitting-room, "an' whiles she gets sort o' turns when she canna sleep, an' it

mak's her a bit feverish an' uncomfortable. I just made her lie down after her dinner, in the hope she wad fall ower. But I'll just gang an' see. If she's no' sleepin', it'll do her gude to hae a crack wi' ye about the music. Puir lassie, it's but a dull time she has here, an' a wee thing helps to brighten it up a bit."

With this needlessly voluminous explanation the good woman departed. She was absent some ten minutes or more. Then she reappeared. "Miss Agnes is no' sleepin', sir. She'll be ben this minute."

Agnes Davidson shortly came in, her appearance fully bearing out the old woman's assertion that something was amiss. Her entrance was abrupt, it came very near being noisy, and there was nothing of its usual placid dulness about her manner. It was animated certainly, but it struck the minister to be suggestive rather of nervous excitement than of natural vivacity. Her face was slightly flushed, and her eyes a trifle heavy. She might have been sleeping, but judging by appearances she might equally well have been crying. Clearly the gloomy old house was not without its skeleton somewhere.

"I hope I have not disturbed you," he said; "your servant insisted on my coming in, or I would have called again."

"Oh, it's all right," she said. "Why shouldn't you come in? There's nothing the matter. I believe I said I'd a headache, or something; or Meg thought I had. She's an old goose. She thinks I'm going to die if my little finger aches.

She wanted me to lie down, but I didn't—I was reading a novel."

"Are you fond of novel-reading?"

"I don't know. Sometimes, when the fit takes me—I do lots of things just by fits and starts. I don't know much about the one I was reading, though. I believe I was thinking of something else. Or perhaps I was half-asleep, after all."

She jerked out her sentences with a sort of flippant fluency as unlike her usual monotonous intonation as was her half-spasmodic liveliness to her ordinary manner. If she was really not ill, there must certainly have been some moral or social disturbance in the house.

"I hope," Mr. Reid said, "the object of my visit will provide you with an occupation which will occasionally help you to pass a little time. I find the harmonium will be ready for use next week, and I think there is the nucleus of a fairly good children's choir in the school."

She clapped her hands, with an excited little laugh. "Oh, that will be nice! I like playing the harmonium. When I feel half choked down here, I can always go up to the church and play it. I will look out some harmonium music directly."

The minister looked at her with a distinct sentiment of commiseration. It was truly a melancholy indication of the tenor of her ordinary life that such an infinitesimal cause of excitement should affect her so strongly.

"I'm afraid a harmonium is but a poor resource in the way of instrumental music," he said. "Its

range is rather limited. It is the need a good deal of both practice

"Oh dear me, Mr. Reid," she citedly, "I don't sing. I can't tea and—and—well, you know, I am children."

"Afraid of children?" he repeated.

"Yes. I know they're always I've seen them in the church, w choir, laughing and nudging one anything went wrong. I can't be quite frightened at them. I'm frig one sometimes. Meg says it's the lonely,"—and she gave a little h is never anyone to speak to but and father is so cross sometimes think how dull and miserable it is!

There was a quaver in her voice distinct threatening of tears. A culine consternation began to minister's soul. He had abundance and of the far more priceless g ready for all suffering. But he w to risk, by any such manifestation of finding himself called upon to desire on the part of an over-excited a few years his junior, to shed upon his manly breast. He answered in very measured tones—

"It must doubtless be very distressing and that is always depressing. Of course, little to tempt you to go out

very bad for you to be so much shut up in the house. In that respect, at least, I hope working with the choir will be an advantage to you. The mere fact of having to go to the church, once or twice in the week, will involve an amount of exercise and fresh air which must be beneficial for you."

"Yes," she said, with a long-drawn sigh, "I daresay it will be good. But what about teaching the children?"

"I think we can get on very well for the present. Miss Tomlinson will practise the different tunes with them in the school. If they meet you once a week in the church, to sing with the harmonium, I think it will be all that will be needed. And I shall make a point of attending that practising myself. I am not a trained musician, but I think I can safely undertake to act choirmaster to that limited extent."

The lugubrious sighing was suddenly exchanged for a rather affected simpering. "Oh, well—really—you know—I hardly know if that will quite do;" and she giggled a little.

"Not do? Why should it not do?"

"Oh, well—you see—I mean—there will be no one else, you know."

"No one else?" repeated the puzzled minister. "I do not quite catch your meaning, Miss Davidson."

"Well, really—it is so awkward—I don't know—something might happen—perhaps it wouldn't matter—you mightn't care—but I don't know if I— However, I'm not going to say anything;" and the giggling grew more pronounced.

With the coolest of possible greetings, and the speediest of possible exits, he got himself out of the house, relieving his feelings with a sort of gasp as the door closed behind him. What marvellous piece of spiritual jugglery was this, transforming the dull, apathetic girl, who seemed as if all interest in life had been crushed out of her by her gloomy surroundings, into a simpering, giggling schoolgirl, apparently excited by a mere business call from a young man into making herself ridiculous and unfeminine? There could be but one explanation—hysteria—thrice blessed word!—imparting to the lay mind, in its exceeding and vague comprehensiveness, a delightfully satisfying sense of accurate understanding. Yes, there could not be a doubt of it. A friend of his mother's had been for years a victim to this mysterious malady, and he recognised at once the well-remembered symptoms, in her case greatly exaggerated. Excessive depression, alternating with excessive excitability; strange freaks and oddities of behaviour; absolute incapacity to exercise reasonable self-control under the pressure of any strong impulse. The girl was unquestionably hysterical, and he began to fear the situation might be serious. Visions of irresistible impulses towards startling extravagances of behaviour during the performance of divine service flitted before his mind's eye—startled efforts on the part of bewildered children to accommodate a particularly solemn psalm tune to the strains of a country dance; perhaps the sudden intervention of the harmonium at some specially telling point in his sermon. The gloom of these

forebodings spoke for the startling effect of the gauntlet he had just run, but his somewhat unreasonable alarm found allayment in the thought of Dr. Munro. It was clear the case could not be so bad as his exaggerated alarm had pictured it, or a medical man must have had some knowledge of it, and would doubtless have said some warning words. If the tendency was intermittent, and Munro had never attended the girl professionally, perhaps he was himself unaware of it. The minister straightway resolved on the first opportunity to make some investigations on the subject.

He found his chance much sooner than he anticipated. Dr. Munro was at the manager's house, discussing the case of Millroy with him. "The fellow won't be up for another fortnight," he said, "but it will be a good deal longer time than that before he can do anything with his left hand. He was saying to me yesterday that as soon as he could move he should ask you to give him a holiday for a few weeks. I think you'd be wise, Mackenzie, if you were to give him a holiday for good and all."

"It's very easy giving advice, my good fellow, when you have not to undertake the responsibility of carrying it out. The man, as you know, is perfectly sober, and there is not a more regular, punctual fellow about the pits, where there is plenty of work suited to his capacities. How could I find any excuse for getting rid of him?"

"Well, it would be difficult, I admit. But I cannot help thinking he is a dangerous sort of fellow. That story he told you, Reid, is quite true. At

least, his head has at some time been badly knocked about. A queer customer of that sort, who has been injured about the head, is one I never quite like. Are you going home, Reid, when you have finished your business with Mackenzie? If so, I'll wait and go with you."

A little later, the two men left the house together. "Now was his time," the minister thought, so he began diplomatically—

"I have just been at Glendyne. I went to speak to Miss Davidson about the choir. She does not seem very well to-day."

"What, Aggie indisposed? My dear fellow, you must have a very lively imagination."

"Not at all. The old woman said she was not well, and seemed to doubt if I could see her. However, she came down, but she certainly did not look well. She seemed a little flushed and excited."

"That is most unusual."

"So I imagined. She has always seemed to me to possess a remarkably equable temperament. I confess it struck me she had been crying, and I thought of what you said about her father."

"I shouldn't wonder if you are on the right track. Aggie has never said anything to me, and of course I could not try to force her confidence, but I have occasionally wondered whether there is not more wrong in that quarter than we know. I have sometimes fancied I caught the rattle of a skeleton in the house."

"Did the possibility ever strike you, Munro, of Miss Davidson being a little hysterical?"

Dr. Munro stopped dead, looked at the speaker for a moment, and then exploded in a hearty fit of laughter.

"Well, of all the ridiculous ideas I ever heard! What put that notion in your head?"

"Oh, I think, as much as anything, a sort of vague resemblance to a friend of my mother's who suffered from such attacks."

"You're a hundred miles off the track this time. No, my dear fellow, you couldn't have hit upon a more absurd idea as regards Aggie. That is about the last complaint she is likely to suffer from. I could almost wish she had a little more nervous excitability about her. Then she would probably fight a little more stoutly against being perpetually shut up in that gloomy dungeon, which is certainly extremely bad for her. Hysteria, indeed! No, my dear Reid, stick to your own profession, and don't make theoretical excursions into mine."

"I humbly apologise," replied the minister, laughing. "All the same," he added to himself, "there is something in that case you haven't got at yet. A dull, apathetic girl doesn't become suddenly an excited, giggling flirt simply because her father has perhaps been bullying her. If it is not hysteria, what is it?"

CHAPTER VII

AN UNWELCOME SUMMONS

NOTWITHSTANDING that superb condition of the manse, vehemently insisted on by old Mr. Davidson, in his capacity as heritor, the shortening October days were well advanced ere the minister was fairly settled therein. By that time Mr. Davidson's opinion of him had risen amazingly. He had ascertained that sundry small embellishments to the house, which had not escaped his hawk-like glance, had been carried out at Mr. Reid's own expense.

Within a week after the minister had moved himself and his belongings to his new home, his surprise was greatly excited by the appearance at his door, one afternoon, of a well-appointed brougham, drawn by a pair of horses. Surprise was rapidly merged in disgust by the sight of Mr. Duff stepping out of the carriage. Chafing under the possibility, repugnant to any honourably-minded man, of harbouring unjust suspicions against anyone, Arthur Reid had instituted some inquiries on his own account regarding his leading heritor, with the result that his uneasiness had

AN UNWELCOME SUM

been more than allayed, his reputation intensified. As in common with many, however, he received him civilly.

"So you've got settled in at last," he said. "I've just come up, you know, and haven't been running up long without any authority from us."

"I should hardly have thought of this business, that point was worth the cost of a twenty-miles' drive to your place on horses, when you could easily have refused to pay the bills."

Mr. Duff gave vent to a half-vicious chuckle. "Upon my word," he said, "I'm uncommonly good at hitting back. I'll drive only to have a round or two. Down there they're all so dreadfully offending the richest man in the county, they'll well live in a pot of honey. I believe I'll turn sick if I didn't sometimes hit them where they say behind my back. There's Miss Crosbys, a nice little girl she used to be setting her on to butter me up now, she thinks I'll leave her money."

Arthur Reid sat silent, choking down his anger as best he might, and playing with a paper-knife. Mr. Duff looked at him with a malicious twinkle in his shifty eyes.

"You don't believe that, eh?"

"How can I possibly know anything about it? I never saw you in Miss Crosby's life."

"But I know. You may talk

true. I can see as far as most people. Have you furnished the whole house?"

"No; only a few rooms."

"I can't say very much for your furniture, if this is a specimen."

"Perhaps not. I got it to please myself, not you."

"You needn't tell me that. Do you mean to say you wouldn't have bought handsomer furniture if you could have afforded it?"

"Most emphatically I do say so," replied the minister, with a scornful laugh. "For in that case I should have bought none at all for the manse of Glendarff. Do you suppose, if I had been a man of independent fortune, I should ever have come here, at my age?"

"Oh, you didn't get Divine direction, then, to come here, where there is a better stipend than you would have as an assistant?"

"That is a point we need not discuss. I came here for what I consider good and sufficient reasons."

"Humph! Well, look here, young man, you rather suit me, you're so jolly rude and disagreeable. It's like tempering the honey with a little lemon juice. You were very high and mighty when I offered to stock your cellar for you. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll furnish the house for you, slap-up, from cellar to garret, with thorough good furniture; you shall choose it yourself. Then you won't feel you're mixed up with the iniquity of my particular business."

"I entirely decline your offer, Mr. Duff, and

I cannot even thank you for it. Moreover, as these suggestions are extremely repugnant to me, I must beg you, once for all, to understand that I look upon your wealth as a thing to be utterly repudiated by all upright men, and that I will not touch a fraction of it."

"Well, now, was ever a crack-brained enthusiast of a total abstainer more inconsistent? You drink whisky yourself sometimes, and yet you turn up your pious nose at my fortune because it was made out of the liquor traffic."

"Big fortunes are not made out of the justifiable use of intoxicating drinks. I daresay a man might thus make a comfortable maintenance, but big fortunes come of the abuse of alcohol."

"What concern is that of mine? I don't catch hold of people, force their mouths open, and pour drink down their throats. If the fools don't know where to stop, it's their own affair, not mine."

"Maybe you'll know better about that some day. Meantime, I tell you I loathe your money. I'd as soon take blood-money as touch a farthing of it. Do you think I would let you furnish my house, and feel that perhaps the very chair I sat upon represented the food and firing for lack of which hapless children had sobbed and shivered through the long hours of a bitter winter night? If you can carry that burden, it is more than I can."

The old man visibly winced, but his face only took on a more evil expression. "Who'd know how you came by it? Do you suppose I should run about the place bawling out, 'I've furnished Reid's house for him'?"

"What in the world has that to do with it?" retorted the minister. "Should I not know it myself? The house would be a very tolerable representation of hell to me."

"You're just a sentimental young fool," was the reply. "It's everyone for himself in this world. Let everyone get what he can, and keep what he can, that's my motto. A nice sort of fool's paradise the world would be if it was ordered after your theories! But I suppose it's no use talking to you."

"I hope not. I only wish it was any use to talk to you."

"You may be very sure it isn't. I've feathered my own nest comfortably, and if so be it is with the feathers of birds that plucked them out of themselves and threw them away, that's no business of mine. You may be sure I'm not going to strip my nest now, at your bidding, and shiver among cold twigs; so good afternoon, and better sense to you."

"Hit," said the minister to himself, as the carriage drove away. "But unless he changes his mood, Heaven grant he may not come here again!"

Arthur Reid's modest house-warming was to consist of a small dinner-party, at which the guests were to be the two Mackenzies and Dr. Munro. But the uncertain condition of one or two patients, living at a considerable distance, had caused the festivity to be indefinitely postponed, and it was not until the first days of November that the doctor announced his notebook indicated a reason-

able hope he might be allowed to enjoy the evening unmolested.

Accordingly, the little party met, Dr. Munro not arriving until just as the excellent dinner provided by the clever manse housekeeper was being placed on the table.

"Is it all right?" asked the host.

"I think so. I have this moment returned from visiting the only risky case I have on hand at present, and he is a good deal better to-day."

Dinner progressed merrily, but just as it was drawing to a close, the door-bell was heard to ring. Dr. Munro straightened himself up with a lengthening face.

"For me," he said. "I know it."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow," replied his host. "It is most likely Dempster come about something."

Dr. Munro shook his head. "Do you suppose I have been so long in practice and yet do not know the sound of the ring of a patient's messenger?—Exactly."

For even as he spoke, the housekeeper had opened the door to say, "A man wants to see Dr. Munro."

"Take him into my study," said the host. "There are lights there."

"No, no; I'll just speak to him at the door. It may be only someone in the village."

He passed into the hall as he spoke. At the door stood a man whose appearance it was a little difficult to make out in the imperfect light, but he seemed to be of the respectable artisan class, as

far as his dress indicated, and was a stranger, evidently, for he asked at once—

“Are you Dr. Munro?”

“Yes.”

“They told me at your house I wad find ye here, sir. I want ye to gang ower to Peter Kelly’s house—him that’s keeper to Mr. Duff.”

“Peter Kelly’s?” repeated the doctor. His worst forebodings were far more than realised. The place was fully five miles from Glendarff, situated in a part of the country with which he was but imperfectly acquainted, and approachable only on foot. “What’s wrong there?” he asked.

“It’s Kelly himsel’, sir. He’s very ill.”

“What sort of illness?”

“I doubt it’ll be a chill he’s been neglectin’. It looks maist like that. I’m his nephew—at least, his niece’s husband. Work being a bit slack at our place, we just ran down for a day or twae to Netherport, an’ I walked ower the hills the morn to see him. I found him very ill, sae I sat wi’ him a while, an’ then thinkin’ he seemed gettin’ worse, I cam’ straight awa’ here to get ye to gang an’ see him.”

“Are you going back with me?” Dr. Munro asked.

“I wish I could, sir, but I canna. I maun push on to Netherport; I maun gang hame the morn. But he’s nae fit to be out there a’ his lane. I maun try an’ arrange to get the wife ower there, some way, the first thing in the mornin’.”

Dr. Munro stood reflecting in silence for a moment. There was nothing in the least

improbable in the story. If Kelly did require medical aid, he would be forced to send for him, all personal enmity notwithstanding, for the simple reason that no other medical man was available. Still he thought, or imagined he thought, the man ran off his story with a sort of monotonous fluency, suggestive of a carefully-learned lesson. But then his judgment at the moment was hardly trustworthy. A man summoned away in the earlier stages of a very pleasant entertainment to trudge five miles over a very rough country at night, for the sake of a man who, with brutal candour, he said to himself, would be far better out of the world than in it, would certainly not be in a frame of mind to take a perfectly unprejudiced view of the subject. And where could there be any possible cause for deception? The messenger seemed to observe his hesitation.

"I hope ye'll no' fail to gang the night, sir. I think there's sair need," he said.

Annoyed at feeling he had displayed a very unprofessional hesitation, Dr. Munro hastily replied—

"Certainly I will go, without fail. But you had better get your wife over as soon as possible."

"I'll do that, sir, ye may be sure. Gude-night, an' thank ye kindly."

"What a confounded nuisance!" said Mr. Mackenzie, when the doctor had told his tale. "And that precious old scoundrel, too! A gamekeeper, indeed! A lot of our men are the most inveterate poachers, and if he isn't thick in it with them, I'm greatly mistaken. There are some

curious caves away among those hills, and the population of this district is greatly maligned if some queer games don't go on there sometimes. I almost wish, Munro, you would let Alan go with you."

"To carry my goloshes and waterproof? My dear Mackenzie, don't you know doctors are privileged men? None of them would interfere with me, even if I came across them. Good luck to your symposium! I fear there is not a chance of my being back in time for even the tail-end of it. The chances are I shall have to stay there all night. By the bye, Reid, if I do not return, and you hear nothing of this woman passing through the village in the morning, you might get a message over to Mossend, asking them to send someone over to see what's up. If it is a neglected chill, he's likely enough to turn delirious."

With these directions, Dr. Munro took his departure, going firstly to his own house, to seek more fit equipment, as well as various other requisites for his expedition. While occupied in collecting such things as he deemed it wise to take with him, the vague suspicions of something behind the apparent circumstances not exactly fitting with them returned to his mind, and refused to be expelled. Then suddenly they crystallised into a definite form. The damage Kelly had sustained in their encounter at The Miner's Rest had not, he knew, lessened the man's enmity towards himself. Was this a trap? The trap, probably, of a clumsy practical joke, designed to substitute a useless nocturnal ramble for an enjoy-

able evening with friends. He might arrive to find the cottage locked up, or in possession of a savage dog, which would angrily resent his intrusion. Be that as it might, he was bound to go; but he took good care to provide himself with a stout walking-stick, which, as he was an expert singlestick man, was a weapon inspiring him with a good deal of confidence in any difficulty short of shot or cold steel. A part of his professional equipment was a portable lamp, giving a clear and brilliant light. In the earlier days of his acquaintance with lonely moorland medical practice, he had once been forced to try and make a somewhat critical examination by the feeble illumination of a home-made and horribly odoriferous dip, compounded of the tallow from a braxy sheep. Dr. Munro had never forgotten that experience.

At length he started, feeling, beyond his chagrin at the necessity for going at all, more of curiosity than uneasiness. His principal fear was of losing his way, from want of sufficiently intimate acquaintance with local landmarks to serve as a guide by night. In broad daylight he would have had no difficulty. The first two miles of his way were easy enough, for so far he had to follow the road leading to Mossend Farm, but after that he would have to strike across the moor, without a vestige of a track, and guide his course chiefly by the outlines of the hills. It was a fine still night, with a rather heavily clouded sky, but the moon was near the full, so there was light enough for all ordinary purposes, especially on a road where trees were conspicuous by absence. He went on briskly

enough until he came to the point where he had to diverge from the road and commit himself to the trackless waste, with but little to guide him save the rather peculiar shape of a hill rising immediately behind Kelly's cottage. Luckily for Dr. Munro, the weather had been dry for some time, so the various mountain burns he had to cross presented little difficulty. Still, his progress was but slow, and it was nine o'clock before he made out, not very far ahead, the little white-washed cottage, standing out against the dark mass of the hill behind it. His attention during his walk had been pretty well absorbed by the difficulties of the road. Now he felt it behoved him to move warily. He approached the cottage noiselessly, holding his stout stick ready for any emergency, and at the distance of a few yards halted and listened intently. His hearing was keen, and he knew that even a faint sound at that distance would be audible in the absolute silence of the lonely moor. But no tremor of a sound-wave broke the stillness, and after a brief pause he advanced to the house. It was one with, in local phrase, but one end. An inner door, on the left of the tiny entry, led to a single dwelling-room. On the right was a door giving entrance to a mere roughly-built annex, with an earthen floor, used as a sort of storeplace for odds and ends. As Dr. Munro drew near the door, he took note of a suspicious circumstance. There was no sign of light in the dwelling-room, although he could distinctly see that neither blind nor shutter shaded the window.

He knocked gently at the door. There was no response, either human or canine ; then again more loudly, but with the same result. Kelly had always been wont to go about with a mongrel retriever at his heels, and the apparent absence of the dog turned the doctor's thoughts in another direction. Was it possible delirium had set in, and the unfortunate man had wandered out to perish among the lonely hills? He tried the door, and finding it unfastened, cautiously opened it a little way. The inner door on the left was wide open, and the room in perfect darkness. Dr. Munro listened again for a moment, holding his own breath. All was silent as the grave. The room contained no living being, for within its limited space, in that absolute silence, he knew his ear would have caught the faintest sound of breathing. Something was clearly very wrong, and light was the first thing to secure. Using an old barrel which was standing outside the house for a table, Dr. Munro lighted his lamp, and advancing into the entry, turned its rays full into the dwelling-room. Then, for a moment, he stood petrified. Near the centre of the room, stretched out on the floor, lay the man he had come to visit, evidently quite dead ; but, as evidently, not dead from illness. A pool of blood surrounded his head, and all the furniture of the room, of which there was a considerable quantity, was tumbled about in wild confusion. But it was not the confusion of a deadly struggle. Nothing was broken, very few things overturned. The room had much the appearance of one abandoned by a not

very methodical housekeeper in the midst of a cleaning.

Startling though the circumstances were, Dr. Munro was probably less horror-stricken than a man of any other profession would have been. The lifeless body and blood-stained floor had no specially revolting aspect for a man used to hospitals and dissecting-rooms. But perceiving that he had apparently arrived on the scene of a murder, his first impulse was to close the window shutter, search the adjoining shed, and then lock the door. Having thus made sure he was alone, and guarded himself from any sudden attack, he proceeded to examine the body. That examination seemed rather to deepen the mystery. It was a clear case of murder. The man had been struck, from behind, a fearful blow with some heavy blunt instrument, and the absence of all signs of a struggle, and of all trace of blood anywhere save just where the head was lying, indicated that death had been instantaneous. But Dr. Munro at once perceived that Kelly had been dead for a good many hours. Unless his so-called messenger had loitered long, or deviated greatly in his course, he had not left the cottage until after the murder had been committed. Kelly, moreover, was wearing his boots and leggings, and their appearance betrayed he had been on the hills that day. Undoubtedly Dr. Munro had been started on a fool's errand, but with what possible object? He stood revolving the point in momentarily increasing bewilderment. A medical man was surely the last person murderers would wish should arrive on the scene

of their crime, yet deliberate measures had been taken to bring him to the spot. As Dr. Munro stood puzzling over this strange problem, a possible solution suddenly occurred to him, and the absurdity of the blundering attempt almost made him smile, notwithstanding the gravity of the circumstances. He had been lured to the cottage in hopes the known enmity between Kelly and himself would lead to suspicion of the murder being fastened upon him. The insuperable bar to the success of this benevolent little scheme, presented by the ease with which experts could detect how long a man had been dead, had probably not been apparent to the malignant stupidity of its concocters.

The motive of the crime appeared to Dr. Munro not very far to seek. He had heard it asserted Kelly had money, and that he kept it concealed about his house. It was doubtless that fact, or supposition, which had cost the man his life. For himself there was, of course, nothing to do but leave the body and everything about the place untouched, and give as speedy notice as possible to the police of what had happened. So turning his back right willingly on the gruesome scene, he carefully locked up the house, and putting the key in his pocket, set out on his homeward journey.

CHAPTER VIII

MIST-WREATHS

DR. MUNRO did not, however, take many steps in the direction of home. He was suddenly seized by an impulse which, under all the circumstances, certainly indicated that his judgment was a little disturbed by the startling incidents of the night. He resolved, instead of making straight for home, to strike across the hills to the farm of Mossend and give Mr. Bryce notice of what had occurred, thus preventing all danger of his shepherds in any way interfering with the murdered man's dwelling before the arrival of the police. It was a rash freak, for though he had previously been direct from Glendarff to both Mossend and the immediate neighbourhood of Kelly's cottage, he was very imperfectly acquainted with the country lying between the two houses. In addition to this disadvantage, the character of the night was changing. The clouds overhead were less dense than when he started from Glendarff, but the air was less clear. He knew, from a good deal of experience of nocturnal expeditions, what, in that special locality, such changes indicated, and that a gradual clearance of all clouds might be anticipated. Prob-

ably in the course of a few hours the full moon might be sailing in an almost cloudless sky. But, in the meantime, the general atmospheric conditions were likely, for a while, to grow rather less, than more suitable for a ramble by night over very imperfectly explored moorland country. The misty air was already, in some places, blurring outlines, while in others the vapour was beginning to condense, and lie in wreaths and cloudlets along the hillsides, obliterating landmarks, and confusing distances.

Dr. Munro, however, being young, active, and withal a good deal excited, embarked with cheerful confidence on his rash venture. Guiding his course by the outline of a hill he knew must lie exactly between the cottage and the house at Mossend, he descended a gradual incline, sloping from the cottage towards a burn at a short distance. But this burn ran at the bottom of a rather deep gully, and in the imperfect light it took him some time to find a place where he might safely scramble down to the water's edge. Still more time was wasted in finding a convenient spot to cross the burn, and when at last he did emerge from the gully, on the other side, the shifting of some floating vapour had dimmed the outline of the hill for which he was aiming, and left him a little uncertain of its identity. Then, as his onward progress altered his point of view, so the outline of the hill itself altered, while other elevations began to interpose, and still further confuse the landmarks. For a while he pressed on, assuring himself it was all right, and that though he might deviate a little

from the direct route, he was, in the main, following the right line. But when a man begins to press these assurances on himself with great fervour, it is a pretty sure symptom his confidence in their trustworthiness is waning, and that he is very near the border of that shadowy realm of doubt and hesitation in which, ere long, he is certain to lose his bearings altogether. After climbing up and scrambling down for a considerable time, Dr. Munro was at last fain to hug his delusion no longer, but admit he was hopelessly lost, knowing neither where he was, nor in what direction he was going. His certainty on this point was clenched by the indisputable fact that he had climbed to a higher elevation, and was stumbling along among some far wider and more precipitous parts of the hills than lay anywhere on the track he had intended following. The situation was not pleasant, but it had no leaning towards the tragic. The weather was mild, and he was very warmly clad. Even were he forced to seek some sheltered nook and bivouac therein until day dawned, discomfort was the worst he had to anticipate. As yet, however, he was not prepared to accept that as the only alternative. If by continuous descent he could light upon a burn, its downward course would infallibly guide him in the direction of home.

He had been wandering about for some time with this object in view, when his faith in his calculations was rudely shaken. The appearance of the moon, for a moment, through a rift in the slowly driving clouds, revealed to him the direction

of the wind, and left him but two alternatives to choose from. Either it had shifted its quarter completely since he had left home, or he was going in quite a different direction from what he had imagined, and might have crossed the water-shed north of Glendarff, in which case the downward course of the waters would only lead him farther and farther from home. He stood for a moment considering this new development of circumstances. Clearly, to find the least uncomfortable bivouac available for the remainder of the night-hours was now the only course open to him; and that conclusion brought suddenly to his memory Mr. Mackenzie's remark about the caverns which existed among these hills. He was standing at the moment on a precipitous slope with a rugged wall of rock stretching along its face immediately behind him. He felt confident he must have strayed into that district of the hills where these caverns existed, and this rocky escarpment looked an extremely likely situation for some of them. He made his way cautiously along its base, examining every nook and cranny as he passed; but for some time in vain. At length, however, he observed, some little distance ahead of him, a sort of darkness without form, which looked very like the entrance to a cavern, and he very soon found he had not been mistaken. But wariness was necessary, and stealing noiselessly a few steps into the gloom, he again stood motionless for a while, listening intently. Then, reassured by the perfect silence which reigned, he lighted his lamp.

Dr. Munro congratulated himself on a lucky hit. He had searched for shelter, and had found both shelter and warmth. The cavern was a spacious one, and was evidently used either by poachers or hill shepherds—probably by both. In one corner, below an aperture in the rock, a rude fireplace had been constructed, and there was some fuel lying beside it. His chances of a fairly comfortable slumber for a few hours were good. Before proceeding to light a fire, however, he thought it prudent to make a thorough examination of the cavern. The wall on the opposite side from the fireplace was very broken and irregular, and he noticed that not far from the entrance a rough projection of rock, jutting out towards the back of the cavern, formed, as it were, a sort of rude screen, concealing behind it a narrow recess, little more than a deep crevice. A faint hope was in his mind that he might there find some provisions, and he was in the act of making a careful search in this hidden nook, when an unexpected sound caused him to stand erect and motionless, listening keenly. Yes, unmistakably, the sound was that of human voices at no great distance. In a moment his lamp was out, and he himself ensconced as far back in the crevice as its breadth would allow. The Glendarff poaching fraternity had the character of being truculent men, not over particular as to the manner in which they manifested their disapproval of any intrusion upon their proceedings. The sounds drew nearer, and shortly men—how many, of course, Dr. Munro could not tell—entered the cavern. There was a noise of shuffling about,

well for him was it he had not acted on his first impulse. It was the murderers of Kelly who were within a few feet of him, and they were jocular over the very different trap they had laid for him, from that into which he had fallen. They seemed also a little inclined to be quarrelsome over some money which they had clearly found.

With every fresh disclosure the gravity of Dr. Munro's situation increased. To have stumbled into a haunt of poachers was one thing; it would be a very different one to be discovered in such a position as would render it certain he had overheard the unguarded talk of a gang of murderers, revealing their own guilt, and discussing the scheme whereby they had hoped to shift suspicion on to his shoulders. At last there fell upon his ears a terrible sentence from Murphy—

"Now for some whisky. There's some ahint the rock, yonder."

"There's nane," said another voice. "It was a' drunk afore we set out."

"Ye're a liar. I'll soon see about that."

Dr. Munro drew himself together, and grasped his trusty stick. The strategic advantages of the position, as well as of the surprise, were with him. He could not be approached from behind, nor in front save by one man at a time; and his acquaintance with Glendarff poachers led him to believe any one of them would approach a foe only armed with a "bit stick," in a spirit of joyous confidence which would pretty well ensure an immediate reduction in the number of his assailants. If fire-arms came into play, he was a lost man. Other-

wise, men had often come scathless out of more desperate circumstances.

These thoughts passed through his mind in the brief moment which elapsed while another voice said something he did not catch, but which seemed to have the effect of convincing Murphy he had been told the truth, for in a surly tone he responded—

“Then someone maun gang an’ fetch mair.”

The proposition was agreed to, but a wrangle followed as to who should go. Recourse was had to lots, and the task fell to Murphy himself. Swearing roundly, he seemed to be preparing to set out. “It’s a bonnie nicht,” shouted a voice after him; “ye’ll hae a pleasant stroll, an’ we’ll maybe tak’ a bit snooze until ye return.” A distant oath from Murphy, and a laugh from the others, followed. There were some shuffling sounds, as though the men were really settling themselves for slumber—then silence.

Dr. Munro drew a deep breath. Now would be his chance of escaping from his perilous position, given only a sufficient time before Murphy’s return for slumber to settle down upon his comrades. He would willingly have given a very large share of his worldly goods at that moment for knowledge of the whereabouts of the reserve supplies of whisky. Shortly, deep heavy breathing and an occasional snore announced that someone was asleep, and Dr. Munro ventured to peep cautiously round the projection which concealed him. The outlook was encouraging. The now clearly burning fire shed a faint but steady light upon the scene, quite

sufficient to enable him to satisfy himself there were only two men left in the cavern. Both were stretched out on the floor, in positions offering no obstacle to his speedy exit. He gave them a few moments longer to deepen, if possible, their slumbers, then firmly grasping his stick, issued from his hiding-place, and stole noiselessly towards the doorway. But he had miscalculated. One of the men was not sleeping, and just as the doctor was stepping into the open air he trod upon a dry stick, which snapped under his foot. The man started up at the sound, and in another moment was on his feet, making it immediately evident that he, at least, recognised the intruder, by shouting to his comrade, with a volley of oaths, that it was "that cursed doctor himself." "Neck or naught," said Dr. Munro to himself, as he plunged headlong into a wreath of mist lying along the hillside immediately below the cavern. It probably saved his life, for he was concealed in it before his pursuers reached the entrance of the cave, and they were thus left uncertain what direction he had taken. Luckily for Dr. Munro, the slope of the hill, at that particular point, was smoother and less precipitous than that which he had previously traversed. The mist-wreath was but a thin strip, and he had barely time to realise the danger of dashing through it at such headlong speed, when he found himself on the other side, racing down the hill for dear life, under the quite sufficient light of a still somewhat misty moon. At some little distance before him lay another wreath, in which he shortly found himself enveloped. It seemed to him some-

what more dense than the previous one, and within its shelter he paused for a moment to listen. No sound of pursuit was audible, and his hope increased that his pursuers had started on a false scent. In that case, could he only avoid Murphy, he had little to fear beyond a night passed among the hills. He continued his way more cautiously, for not only was the wreath denser, but broader, and he felt the ground growing rougher under his feet. At length the gradual transformation of the mist into a luminous haze warned him he was approaching clear moonlight again ; and just as the surrounding scene was becoming clear to him, he all but ran against the very man he most dreaded meeting. He caught the expression of astonishment, terror, and hatred which crossed Murphy's face at the recognition, and noted instantly that he carried, not only a game-bag well filled with something, but also a gun.

"Murphy!" he exclaimed, with that quick intuition which is almost an inspiration. "I was never so glad to meet anyone in my life. But what on earth are you doing here?"

"Mair need to ask what you are doing here?" retorted the man, eyeing Dr. Munro suspiciously.

"That's easily told," replied the doctor. "I am vainly trying to make out where I am, and how to reach Kelly's cottage."

"Kelly's cottage? Man, ye're miles aff yer road. But what wad ye be goin' there for, at this time o' night?"

"I got a message that he was very ill and wanted to see me. I've lost my way, and been

roaming about for I don't know how long. Do you know anything of his illness?"

"No. I've no' seen him this some time. He was weel enough the last time I saw him."

"I wish I knew how ill he is, and whether I might safely leave him till the morning."

"It's what ye'll hae to do, ony gait," replied the man in a surly tone. "Ye've wandered a'thegither aff yer course. Ye're gude four miles awa' at the nearest, an' a rough road ye couldna follow by night."

"Couldn't you guide me?" Dr. Munro asked diplomatically.

"Not I; I've ither fish to fry."

"Well, but then, how far am I from home?"

"Weel on to seven miles. Ye ken Mossend?"

"Yes."

"Weel, ye're clean awa' the ither side o't frae Glendarff."

"Good Lord! how I have wandered!" Dr. Munro exclaimed. "But that's an idea. I'll make for Mossend, if you'll direct me, and stay there till morning. Then I could be at Kelly's place pretty early. I'm far too tired for a seven-mile walk home to-night."

"Weel, ye maun gang straight for'ard till ye come to the burn. Then strike up the water. About a matter o' twae hundred yards higher up there's a wee foot-bridge. Gang ower that, an' strike a wee to yer left, ower the shoulder o' the hill. At the rate it's clearin' it'll be gude moonlight by the time ye cross the ridge, an' ye'll see the farmhouse awa' in the distance, across the valley."

"Thanks," said Dr. Munro. "And, look here, Murphy, I'll not mention I met you, if you'll give me a brace of those grouse you've got in your game-bag."

Murphy chuckled. "Ay, they're bonnie birds; but I'll no' can spare ye one the night. Maybe I'll leave a brace at yer house for ye ane o' these days, if ye're very discreet."

They parted with a laugh, which at least on Dr. Munro's side was a very hollow one. The brief colloquy had seemed to him to last for an age, in his dread lest the other scoundrels should appear upon the scene. Even now his life hung by a thread. There were three of them, and at least one gun among them. If they should meet before he got clear away, his chances of ever reaching home alive were very small. He had not, of course, the smallest intention of following the directions given to him; but Murphy's description of the position of the farmhouse had given him his bearings. The burn he was approaching was one he had fished. Its farther bank was smooth and level. If he crossed the bridge, and struck down stream the other side, he could very soon put a long distance between him and the trio of rascals in eluding whom lay his only chance of life, and he would be going in the direction of home. It was rough ground he was crossing, and he had to proceed at a much slower pace than he liked, both until he reached the burn, and had made his way to the bridge, which he shortly reached.

With a sigh of relief as the deadly peril which had hung over him for what seemed an eternity

appeared to be merging into a blissful sensation of perfect safety, Dr. Munro was just about to step on to the bridge, when impulse made him turn and look back. The moon was now shining pretty clearly, but the two mist-wreaths, greatly attenuated, were still lying along the hillside. In the moonlit space between them he could clearly discern three figures tearing at headlong speed down the slope. Then the worst had happened. Murphy and his accomplices had met, and all three were now in hot pursuit of the man who must be silenced for ever that night, if their own necks were to be safe from the rope.

Dr. Munro cast a despairing glance around. Escape seemed hopeless. His pursuers had probably not yet seen him. Their rapid descent would concentrate all their attention on their own footsteps, but in a few moments they would be in full view of him. He had not even time for the forlorn hope of seeking some patch of more than usually bushy heather, and stretching himself flat therein. He had no chance to sell his life dearly. The gun would settle that. With a desperate intent to try an almost certainly useless race for life, he turned to dash over the bridge, and then discerned that the concealment which had seemed so hopelessly beyond all attainment was lying at his very feet. Immediately below the bridge, where the hillside had originally shelved down to the very edge of the burn, a slight bend in its course threw the full force of its frequent floods strongly against the bank on which he stood, and thus the loose soil at the extremity of the slope had been gradually washed

away, until an abrupt earthen wall, some five feet in height, had been worked out in a shallow curve along the shingly margin of the water. The continual action of floods had considerably undermined this earthen wall, and a rough growth of coarse grass and ragged heather overhung it, under which the shadow was deep. Lying close beneath it, in the dark-coloured clothes which, luckily for him, he was wearing, Dr. Munro saw at a glance he would be safely hidden from everything save a searching scrutiny of the water's edge, and that would, almost certainly, not be the first action of his pursuers. In another moment he was safely ensconced in this providential shelter, awaiting the development of circumstances. If his foes made off, as he expected, with all speed over the hill, his own course was easy, and probably quite safe. Very shortly he caught the sound of rapid footsteps, and the three men, hurrying greatly, and panting grievously, reached the bridge. Clearly, if he had deemed himself in no training for a breakneck race over bank, bush, and scar, they were not in much better case. On the bridge they halted, and the doctor could both see and hear quite distinctly all that passed.

"We should see him now, if he's gane the way ye tauld him, Murphy," panted one.

"Na, na, curse him! He wad ken fine we might foregather, an' hurry a' he's fit. He'll be weel ower the shoulder o' the hill. Awa' after him, lads, as fast as ye like. I'm that blawn wi' hurryin' up the hill when I caught sight o' ye, I'm nae fit to gang a step farther. I'll bide here in hidin'. If he

chances to see ye, he'll likely try to double back, an' tak' down the water for hame. Drap him if ye see him, an' I'll do the like. He maunna escape us. If his cursed tongue's no' silenced the night, he'll hang us a'. Hurry back if ye dinna see him when ye cross the ridge. If he's makin' for Mossend, ye canna but see him then."

The two men, one armed with a gun, crossed the bridge, and began climbing the hill. A certain increased huskiness in Murphy's tones had suggested to Dr. Munro that his inability to hurry was not wholly due to overtasked lungs, and his immediate proceedings favoured that hypothesis. He stood for a few moments looking after his accomplices; then, in place of seeking concealment, he seated himself on the bridge, near its junction with the bank, his feet dangling over the sandy margin of the burn, and drawing a flat bottle from his pocket, took a long draught. Luckily, he had turned his back in the direction of Dr. Munro's hiding-place. For him it was now or never. Murphy's comrades would shortly reach a point from which, in the now clear moonlight, they would sweep at a glance the whole distance between them and the farmhouse and perceive their destined victim was not to be found in that direction, and their return would be instant. Rising cautiously from his hiding-place, Dr. Munro stole noiselessly along the sand towards the unsuspecting and probably drowsy sentinel, then raising his stick, he caught him a swingeing blow on the back of the head. Without a sound, Murphy dropped in a confused heap on the sand below him. At the

same moment Dr. Munro caught the sound of a distant whistle from the ridge of the hill, and catching up Murphy's gun, he darted over the bridge, and took to his heels down the farther bank, carrying with him the satisfactory conviction that it would be some time before Murphy recovered consciousness; a longer period before he would emerge from a half-dazed condition; a much longer one before he would be rid of an exceedingly painful lump on the back of his head.

CHAPTER IX

SUSPICIONS

IT was close on four o'clock in the morning when Dr. Munro dragged his weary limbs up to the abode of the solitary policeman entrusted with the guardianship of Her Majesty's lieges in Glendarff, and aroused him from his peaceful slumbers. A messenger was at once despatched to headquarters in Netherport, and the policeman, accompanied by a volunteer assistant, set out to mount guard over the cottage, and the remains of the murdered man, until the arrival of his superiors. Then Dr. Munro betook himself home to secure the food and rest of which he stood so sorely in need, pending the summons that would certainly arrive ere many hours elapsed, to return with the authorities to the scene of the murder. He was soon sunk in a profound slumber, and when at last he awoke with a start, appearances seemed to indicate the day being farther advanced than it should have been before his presence was required. He looked at his watch. It was past eleven o'clock, and he hastily rang his bell. His housekeeper brought him news of the latest development of the strange drama. The inspector on his arrival, in the early morning,

with a staff of subordinates, had been met by one of Mr. Bryce's shepherds, with the news that the policeman and his companion had been surely guided to the cottage by the glare of the flames in which it had been wrapped. On reaching the spot, they found the fire raging with a fury which indicated abundant use of some very inflammable material. The shepherd arriving on the scene shortly afterwards, had readily explained that circumstance. In the outhouse adjoining the dwelling there had been two barrels of tar, kept there for the convenience of the shepherds. The murderers, apparently, disappointed in the search for Dr. Munro, had returned to the scene of their crime, and taken advantage of such an excellent method of confusing the situation. They had clearly made abundant use of material so admirably suited for their purpose. The inspector had therefore decided it was needless to disturb Dr. Munro before the arrival of the fiscal. He was momentarily expected, and the minister and Mr. Mackenzie were downstairs, waiting to see Dr. Munro as soon as he was awake.

The fiscal drove up just as the doctor descended the stairs, rather crisp in temper. He had thought he saw his way to an idle day, and had been just sitting down to breakfast in company with a racy French novel; not a washy, expurgated translation, but the highly-spiced original, in all its native luxuriance, which he enjoyed the blessed privilege of being able to grapple with ease, when he was summoned to set out upon this disagreeable expedition. As a result, he was inclined to be a little

captious over Dr. Munro's steady refusal to commit himself to any opinion as to whether the voice of either of Murphy's companions was that of the messenger who summoned him from the manse.

"Do you mean to tell me you talked with the fellow at the manse door about half-past six, and can form no idea whether it was his voice you heard again toward one o'clock in the morning?"

"Certainly I do. My attention on the first occasion was pretty closely concentrated on the disagreeable nature of the summons. It did not occur to me to make any critical observations on the summoner's voice."

"But you saw the fellow on both occasions."

"In a manner I did, but it was little more than seeing a figure which was evidently that of a man. I should not recognise him now if you produced him here before me."

"And the other fellow? Was his voice in no way familiar? Did it not bring anyone to your thoughts?"

Dr. Munro smiled. "My dear sir," he said, "you may be quite sure had any voice there merely suggested someone, I should be most careful not to mention the fact. Even without our encounter, I could have sworn to Murphy. His voice is not to be mistaken. But I would certainly not fasten even the faintest suspicion of being concerned in a murder upon anyone merely on a chance resemblance in voice."

The fiscal was making a note. Dr. Munro caught the minister's eyes fixed upon his face with

a steady, searching look, and answered with a quiet smile. The inspector entered at the moment. He had been instituting searching inquiries, but there was no one missing from Glendarff other than those whose absence was satisfactorily accounted for, save Murphy, who, it appeared, had shown Mr. Mackenzie, early the previous morning, a telegram from Glasgow, summoning him to come instantly, as his brother was not expected to live.

"Humph!" grunted the fiscal. "Well, I suppose I had better go over to the confounded place. I think you had better come, Dr. Munro."

"With all due deference to you," replied Dr. Munro, "I think not. The inspector can tell you there is nothing there save a heap of smouldering ashes and the tottering remains of half-burned walls. I do not see that any good can come of my going over to inspect them, and I have patients to attend to, whom it is important I should see as early as possible to-day."

The reasonableness of the objection was too obvious to allow it to be overruled. The fiscal withdrew, and after a brief discussion over the strange affair, Mr. Mackenzie followed his example.

"Don't go, Reid," Dr. Munro said. "Sit down while I get some breakfast. Curious, is it not, to think it is not eighteen hours since we were sitting so comfortably around your dinner-table? I'll wager the intervening time seems a precious sight longer to me than it does to you."

"Whom do you suspect, Munro?" asked the minister quietly.

The doctor laughed. "You are sharper than

the fiscal, or I should have had a rare heckling. Of course I hold it almost a certainty the man who came to the manse was one of Murphy's comrades. The other,"—he paused a moment,—“Reid, I cannot shake off a strong impression it was Millroy.”

“Millroy?” exclaimed the minister. “He has been away for over a month.”

“Exactly, and is therefore not returnable among the unaccounted for missing.”

“But what is the cause and extent of your suspicion?”

“I really can hardly tell you. Under such circumstances as mine last night, a man does not take accurate notes of his own mental processes. I suppose there was something in the voice, perhaps something in the general cut of the man, as I saw him cross the bridge. But I really do not think it was until I was well on my way home, and felt I was in tolerable safety, that I fully grasped, myself, the fact of having any such impression. Now that my head is quite cool and clear again, I cannot shake it off.”

The minister, sitting with his feet on the fender and his arms resting on his knees, took up the poker, and meditatively balanced it on one of his fingers. He seemed to find in the occupation some aid to clearness and precision of thought, for after a short silence, he said—

“There seem to me to be two objections to your theory. Millroy does not strike one to be a man likely to commit a murder merely for the sake of robbery; and he surely would not have been a

party to an attempt to drag you into it, who have certainly been very kind to him."

"Well, both these objections are founded on the assumption that Millroy really is what he appears to us to be. As you know, I have never felt quite satisfied about that man. The last and safe part of my homeward journey this morning was very dreary, and I beguiled the way with much meditation on the subject. Millroy strikes me to be a not unlikely subject for monomania."

"But isn't homicidal mania generally impulsive, not coldly calculating, as in this case?"

"I don't think it is pure homicidal mania. You remember that story about his trying to stab the man who wanted to make him drink whisky?"

"Perfectly well."

"Well, that curious episode has always struck me to suggest some tragical occurrence in Millroy's life connected in some way with drink. I could never account for it in any other way."

"Certainly," the minister said, "a man must have some extraordinarily exaggerated feeling on the subject to lead him to attempt to stab a man merely because he tried to force spirits on him."

"Exactly. But, of course, that kind of exaggerated feeling is what might naturally follow if some great calamity had fallen on a man of his temperament through the agency of drink. His is just the sort of physique from which one would look for morbid brooding over any great disaster, and nothing, I think, would be more probable than his brooding himself into the craze that he had a special mission to kill men who were or had been

connected with the drink traffic. Given that Kelly was the man I take him to have been, and that Millroy had some knowledge of the fact, the rest seems to me probable enough. In that case the money has been the lure to accomplices, and Millroy would not care one jot about me or anyone else being implicated. Fanatics of that sort, when they are out on the war-path, have, I believe, no perception of anything beyond their craze."

Here the poker fell with a crash into the grate, and it had to be balanced again before the minister found himself ready to hazard the simple query—

"I wonder where Millroy came from?"

"That, for some reason, he is determined no one shall know."

"What if it was from Edinburgh, and Kelly in some way connected with the warping of his life? Such a house as that you described must cast many people adrift on the world with good reason for a thirst for vengeance. If Millroy came here, brooding and revengeful, to find he had lighted on close neighbourhood with his enemy, he would probably regard the circumstance as a sort of providential direction."

"True. And the poetical justice would be complete. Pity these are all pure hypotheses!"

"And never in the least likely to be anything more, for us, unless they catch Murphy, which I greatly doubt. But, Munro,"—and he paused for a moment as if reflecting,—"if I had any certainty of the facts being according to our rather elaborate fancy sketch, I would not give Millroy up to justice."

"Not?" replied the doctor, with an accent of surprise.

"No," replied Arthur Reid, with decision and suppressed vehemence, "I would not. Surely you, walking hospitals, must have seen as much of the horrible results of the drink traffic as I have done, working in a big town. Think of it all, and of a villain like Kelly going free, and living in comfort, while men, women, and children by the score have died, or are living in want and misery, as the result of the temptation into which he has spared no effort to lure them! Think of the many who have endured penal servitude, it may be even death itself, for crimes for which he was really responsible. No, no. His murder is a wild sort of revenge, inconsistent with social safety, and I would leave no stone unturned to hinder such an act. But once accomplished, were I certain the man who did it was one of the victims whose whole life had been blighted by that infernal traffic, I would never betray him."

"You have the courage of your opinions, Reid," said the rather startled doctor.

"Yes. There are criminals the law cannot touch, and a man who carries on that accursed traffic, in the way it is carried on by men such as that fellow Kelly,—I am, of course, assuming he is the Kelly you believe him to be,—is one of the worst of them. If a maddened victim hunts one down, and kills him like a wild beast, I would never help to put a rope round the neck of the man who did it. The pendulum may swing too far, you know. Brutal callousness about human life lies at one extreme ;

but at the other is morbid sentimentality. We are in more danger from the last now than from the first."

"Go ahead, my dear fellow," replied Dr. Munro. "You seem to have a well-filled magazine of fine revolutionary theories to draw upon, and should make your name well known in the world some day. Meantime, I must go and visit some patients. I only wish I might be the first person to interview Millroy when he returns."

"If he returns, will not that mere fact tell against the probability of your suspicion?—and thus," he added, with a laugh, "bring all our beautiful fabric of hypotheses and theories to the ground with a crash."

Dr. Munro stood reflecting for a moment. "I don't know," he said. "Yes, I think he will probably think it is all safe, if he knows, as he most certainly will do, that the others have got safe off. Of course, the matter took a rather unexpected turn, but he cannot know I was close to the bridge when they passed, and I don't think he will fear my having recognised him in the cavern. It would be almost more dangerous for him to stay away than to return."

In effect Millroy did return a few days later, but it was not given to Dr. Munro to be the first person to meet him on his arrival. The minister himself, on his way to the house of an outlying parishioner, encountered him coming leisurely up the glen, with his worldly goods tied up in a pocket-handkerchief and hung on a stick over his shoulder. "Now for it," said Arthur Reid to himself, stopping as they met.

"Well, Millroy," he said, "so you are getting back. I hope you are better?"

"Yes, sir, thank you. I feel my arm a deal stronger. I think I'll be quite fit for work now."

"You have been absent some time, I think."

"Five weeks the morn's morn, sir."

"I suppose you have not heard our startling news?" Mr. Reid said, keeping covertly a close watch on the man's face, which wore its ordinary listless, brooding expression.

"No, sir, I've heard naught."

"Peter Kelly has been murdered."

The man gave a slight start, and his apathetic expression gave place to one of interest.

"Do ye say so, sir? I thought that wad happen some day. Is it Murphy?"

"Murphy is one. There are others mixed up in it. But if you had any reason to think such a thing probable, why did you not speak in time to prevent such a crime?"

"An' get my ain head broken for a meddlin' fool? Na, na; it's been damaged quite enough already. Let them as tak's to their kind o' doin's settle their ain affairs."

"But what made you at once suspect Murphy?"

"Because I ken fine the ill blood there's been between them this some time. Murphy's to the fore in a' the poachin' that gangs on, an' Kelly was in the thick o't too; an' they'd had some desperate quarrels lately. Kelly, ye ken, is awfu' thrawn when he's been takin' drink. Then there was anither thing. They a' ken I'm a quiet-goin' sort o' a chap, that doesna tak' much heed o' onybody,

an' some o' them have chattered a heap whiles when I was by, about the money they were sure Kelly had hidden awa' somewhere. Murphy was keen about that, too. Wi' the twae things workin', I jaloused what wad happen some day. Hae they gotten Murphy?"

He asked the question in the same measured way in which he had given his explanation. Not the faintest accent of anxiety was perceptible.

"No, they have not secured any of the murderers."

"But then how do ye ken that Murphy's in't?"

The minister briefly explained what had happened, closely watching his listener the while. But not a look or movement calculated to arouse suspicion could he detect. Millroy only smiled quietly when he heard of the attempt to throw suspicion on Dr. Munro.

"That's the foolishhest trick ever I heard tell on. If a doctor wanted to put a man out o' the road, I doubt he kens a hantle better ways o' doin' it than knockin' him on the heid that gait. I'll lay that was Murphy's notion. He's little better than a born natural some ways."

"At any rate he has shown sharpness enough in getting out of the way," Mr. Reid said. "They haven't been able to get any clue to him."

"He'll likely be out o' the country by this time," Millroy replied. "Ye see, he kens every inch o' the hill country, an' he'd easy gie them the slip; an' bein' sae near the coast, he'd get aff as a stowaway, likely, or get ta'en on where they were short o' a

han'. Murphy was at sea a while as a laddie. He kens somethin' o' handlin' ropes an' sails."

"Probably you have your own reasons for holding that opinion," Arthur Reid said to himself, as he resumed his walk. Given the accuracy of Dr. Munro's impressions, the escape of the one man, and the return of the other, were circumstances likely to hang together. Murphy did not manifest any of the characteristics of a criminal of the chivalrous type, and would be very unlikely to allow an accomplice to escape the due reward of his crimes, if the rope was round his own neck.

The minister was on the point of starting for Dr. Munro's house that evening, in order to tell him of his meeting and conversation with Millroy, when the doctor himself arrived at the manse.

"I had a visit from the inspector to-day," he said, "so I came over to post you up in the latest particulars. But first, do you know that Millroy turned up this afternoon?"

"I do." And then he described his meeting and interview with the object of their suspicions.

"It all seems very much what one would expect from an innocent man," Dr. Munro said.

"True. But I could not help noticing that he was not quite his ordinary self. His manner was natural enough, and his speech just as usual, even to his occasional slight hesitation in bringing out the word he wants. Still, he was very wide awake, for him. That sort of apathetic listlessness which leaves one in general uncertain whether he takes in more than half one says, was conspicuous by absence. But, of course, the circumstances were

startling, and sufficient to wake even him up a little. I suppose there is no trace of either of the others?"

"Not a vestige. Neither can any clue be got as to the identity of the third man, or to that of the other two, if you like to put it so. There does not seem to be a suspicious circumstance attaching to anyone in this neighbourhood, so the police impression is both were strangers, pressed into service by the inducement of a share of the spoils. Murphy's circle of acquaintance would probably afford a wide field for the selection of any number of assistants in such a piece of business. But one of our hypotheses, Reid, has turned out solid fact."

"Really?"

"Yes, really. In the hope of reaching some clue through motive, the inspector interviewed Mr. Duff regarding Kelly's antecedents. The old fox professes to know very little about what he had been prior to entering his service. He said that he had of course found it very difficult to get a watcher for the moors willing to live at such a lonely spot, and that Kelly had been recommended to him, as a man who, in his youth, had had some experience of the work. He did go so far as to admit he believed he had kept a public-house in Edinburgh. Of course, with that information in his hands, the inspector very soon traced the fellow out. Kelly was the man I thought him to be, and the character of the house he kept is still a household word among the Edinburgh police. Now, if we could only venture to put them on the scent of Millroy's

antecedents, we should probably unearth quite a romance of crime."

"Could you not trace them out for yourself?"

Dr. Munro shook his head. "Too expensive, and too risky. If the connection exists, it would be most interesting, scientifically, to work it out. But that sort of investigation costs a deal, both of time and money. Moreover, when you once begin it, you never know exactly where it may land you. I might chance to let daylight in upon more than I intended. I am not sure I go quite so far as you do, but I should be very sorry, as the case stands, to cast the shadow of a suspicion on Millroy."

CHAPTER X

IMPROVING THE OCCASION

NETHERPORT, not suffering in the matter of sensations from the languor produced by over-stimulation, pounced with healthy appetite and keen appreciation upon even so moderately exciting an incident as the murder of a gamekeeper, dwelling at some nine miles' distance, among the lonely hills, and personally unknown to ninety-nine-hundredths of the population. The remaining hundredth rose rejoicing to a little brief importance, and he who could assert he was actually an acquaintance of the murdered man, and could repeat scraps of conversations he had held with him, when he chanced to visit Netherport, became quite an authority on all points connected with the mystery; his opinion carrying great weight, not only concerning Kelly's appearance, habits, and sentiments, but also regarding the probable causes and circumstances of his death.

When any human being is brought into special prominence in this world, through being promptly and effectually removed out of it, tongues and imaginations are apt to run riot over the subject with most unbridled licence. A blissful, if un-

acknowledged, consciousness lies soothingly in every human breast that a dead man can bring no actions for slander; and there are so many assertions which may be hazarded regarding him, without fear of his relations being in a position to contradict them, that a sort of oblique notoriety, through divulgence of this or that peculiarity on the part of the hero of the hour, can easily and safely be enjoyed. Amidst this rank growth of imaginative reminiscences there are sure to be some few shoots of fact, more or less distorted in their struggle for existence with the more vigorous crop of pure fictions; and one of these shoots, in Kelly's case, was his former connection with the liquor traffic. The total abstainers of Netherport fell upon the fact in a perfect fury of fervent desire to improve the occasion. Mrs. Gillespie hurried to the manse in a prodigious state of excitement.

"I am assured," she said, "that the man was in some way intimately connected with Mr. Duff."

"Of course," replied Mrs. Crosbie, rapidly preparing for action, as she always did when Mrs. Gillespie came upon the topic of Mr. Duff. "He was his gamekeeper."

"Oh, that is not at all what I mean. There seems to be little doubt he was a poor relation. It is said the murder is distinctly traceable to some dreadful scandal arising out of the drink traffic, and that there will be most startling disclosures at the trial."

"It will be time enough to talk about the trial when the murderers are caught," replied Mrs. Crosbie scornfully. "As to the man being related to Mr.

Duff, that is really too ridiculous." The man who it was not absolutely impossible might become her son-in-law, or who might dower her daughter, was not one to be lightly accused of having poor relations of doubtful character hidden away among the lonely hills, and giving rise to unpleasant scandal by getting murdered.

"I see nothing ridiculous in it. Anyone can see Mr. Duff is a man of low origin."

"That has nothing to do with it. If he had been born a street arab, that would not prove any likelihood of his being related to this particular man. But it happens Mr. Duff was here to-day, and he assures me he knows very little about the man ; that he engaged him on the recommendation of a friend, and does not very clearly remember what he said about him."

"I do not place quite so much faith in Mr. Duff as you do," retorted Mrs. Gillespie, ever eager to testify to her conviction that a tendency to be a little too intimate with this man was a distinct flaw in the manse fervour for the sacred cause. To extract money from him for righteous purposes was, of course, quite a different thing from cultivating his personal acquaintance. "But even supposing that is true, it does not do away with the fact that drink is in some way the cause of this dreadful murder."

"Perhaps the one assertion has just as much truth in it as the other," replied Mrs. Crosbie. "But we shall hear more to-morrow. Mr. Reid is coming to attend the meeting of the Presbytery, and will dine and sleep here."

"Ah, I hope this terrible lesson may not be lost

on that young man. He shirked the question when I asked him how he would fight the drink fiend without being a total abstainer himself. Perhaps he will now feel a little less self-confident on that point. From all I hear, his efforts in that direction have chiefly been confined to being personally rude and disagreeable to Mr. Duff. I do not see what good that can do, and I think a Christian minister should be courteous to all men, even to those whom he is bound to disapprove."

"Mr. Duff does not speak as if he felt personally aggrieved in any way by Mr. Reid. He seems to be rather interested in him."

"Very satisfactory, certainly, to a minister, to be an object of special interest to a drink-seller," snapped Mrs. Gillespie, irritated by the chilling temperature to which she felt her ardour exposed. "Ah, here comes the minister. I was longing to see you, Dr. Crosbie. We are all so much excited over this terrible murder."

"A most distressing occurrence, truly," responded the phlegmatic doctor.

"Terrible, terrible, and entirely the result of drink, I hear. I do hope you will enlarge upon it in your sermon on Sunday."

"My dear Mrs. Gillespie, I assure you there is no ground for any such belief. There is, of course, no inherent improbability in such a supposition; but there is no evidence to that effect."

"Oh, indeed? I hear on all hands there can be no doubt on the point. I think it will be a great pity if such an opportunity is lost."

"I think it would be a greater pity if a moral

was hastily drawn from it which might afterwards prove to have no foundation in fact. I have just been talking to the inspector, and he tells me they have not been able to find a trace of any other incentive to the crime than the belief which seems to have prevailed that Kelly had a considerable sum of money hidden somewhere about his cottage."

"But I understand it is certain Kelly had, in times past, been connected with the drink traffic."

"Yes, I believe there is no doubt of that."

"Then you have the connection between drink and this murder established at once. It is quite clear a man could not save a great deal of money, in so few years, out of a gamekeeper's salary. It must have been money he had made in the liquor traffic, which he was known to have by him. Doubtless some of his old associates knew about it, and bribed this man Murphy to help them, because of his knowledge of the country. I think the whole case most interesting and instructive."

"That theory may be quite correct. But in face of the inspector's expressed opinion, I should not feel justified in grounding any public remarks upon it."

"Oh, you can never trust the police. There is far too much profit to be made out of connivance at illicit sale of drink for any dependence to be placed on them. I am positively assured that there is something very discreditable to Mr. Duff behind this business. In that case, you may be sure the inspector has been heavily bribed by him to put forward opinions on the subject most likely to keep everything of that sort in the dark."

"Really, Mrs. Gillespie," exclaimed Mrs. Crosbie, in great excitement, "I must beg you not to make such remarks about Mr. Duff here. Of course we all regret much he should have any connection with a traffic we so greatly deplore, but he has always been on friendly terms with us, and I, for one, have never seen anything about him to justify the ill-natured remarks made upon him. I really cannot allow him to be slandered in my drawing-room."

"Yes, indeed, my dear madam," chimed in Dr. Crosbie majestically, drawing support and encouragement, as the masculine mind is apt to do, from the impetuosity of the feminine rush upon an antagonist, "I think you will do well to be a little more cautious what you say. I do not think either Mr. Duff or the inspector would be very likely to let such accusations pass unnoticed, if they chanced to hear of them."

Mrs. Gillespie retired, a little startled at this prosaic view of the matter, and lamenting deeply the want of zealous fervour at the manse. "They are lukewarm," she said to one of her most trusted fellow-workers. "There can be no question on that point. As long as Dr. Crosbie is regarded as the leader of the temperance movement in Netherport, we shall never make way."

"It is she who is most in fault," was the reply; "and it is that man Duff's money that does the mischief. I really believe she hopes he will leave some of it to her daughter. She is always thrusting her upon his notice. I wish you saw the smoking-cap the girl has just finished embroider-

ing for the old rascal,—a thing only fit to be kept in a glass case as a specimen. She does that kind of work beautifully. The materials must have cost pounds.”

“The girl would be better employed in learning how to make an honest livelihood for herself,” replied Mrs. Gillespie scornfully, “than in angling after such ill-gotten gains. That is not a sort of fortune likely to bring a blessing with it.”

Undeterred by any such pious scruples, Mrs. Crosbie was more than ever bent on vigorously seeking the accomplishment of her designs for her daughter. The cheering stimulus of hopeful symptoms had lately been vouchsafed to her to a gratifying extent. Mr. Duff came to the manse even more frequently than of yore, and had indulged in significant jokes with Ellen.

“Well, Nellie, getting on for twenty-one. Quite time you were settling down in a house of your own. How is it I never find any nice young men about the house?”

“They are so dreadfully scarce, Mr. Duff,” the girl would reply, with her merry laugh.

“Humph! Most of them got as much as they can do in keeping themselves, I suppose, without keeping anyone else. Well, my dear, when the right one comes, you can tell him I am prepared to come down handsomely for spoons and forks, you know.”

Then, after these sort of jocular observations, Mrs. Crosbie rejoiced to observe that Mr. Duff almost invariably began asking questions about the young minister at Glendarff, as though the one

subject naturally suggested the other. What was he doing? Had he been in Netherport lately? Certainly, some bright frosty day, when he felt inclined for the walk, he would go over to Glendarff and hear what sort of a preacher the young fellow was.

These trifling symptoms caused Mrs. Crosbie's heart to beat high with hope. Surely her own visions found a reflection in the old man's mind; and Mr. Reid undoubtedly came to the manse whenever he was in Netherport. Only a few days before the murder, she had been gladdened, on coming in from a walk one afternoon, by finding Mr. Reid and her daughter drinking tea in the drawing-room, and both in a very hilarious mood. She thought she had never seen Ellen show to greater advantage. Animation was most becoming to her. Mr. Reid had particularly wished to see Dr. Crosbie, and her judicious daughter had invited him to await her father's appearance, and had given him tea, altogether comporting herself in a manner which was as indicative to her mother of a charming mixture of amiability and good sense, as it would have been of flippant folly had one of the detrimentals of Netherport been in question.

These various circumstances, taken in conjunction with each other, had greatly exercised Mrs. Crosbie's mind over the impending Presbytery meeting and dinner, and rendered Mrs. Gillespie's visit that day specially annoying to her. She even went the length of terming her, after her exit, a narrow-minded, ill-tempered bigot. Dr. Crosbie, in his inmost soul, was not insensible to certain

flaws in total-abstinence theories, and discrepancy in total-abstinence practice. To the masculine mind is generally denied that buoyant lightness of tone which enables the ordinary feminine mind to soar joyously on the wings of sentiment over all such mundane obstacles as flaws and inconsistencies, and Dr. Crosbie's mind, in this respect, was masculine even to ponderousness, while in character he was somewhat lacking in firmness of purpose. His attitude, therefore, towards the great cause was wont to be a shade vacillating, and to be momentarily swayed by pronounced opinions; and his wife was well aware that such an outburst as Mrs. Gillespie's, at that particular moment, would not render more easy the carrying out of a certain fell design which had grown up in her own mind. However, she deemed the matter of importance, so she came boldly up to the attack, when she and her husband chanced to be alone that day, after the early dinner.

"I think Mr. Duff seems to be really rather taken with Mr. Reid," she said. "It would be well for both if they could be thrown a little together."

"How for both?"

"Mr. Reid's ability and high character would be likely to exercise a good influence on Mr. Duff, and Mr. Duff's wealth would be so useful to him in his parish."

"My dear! you heard the strong opinions on that subject which Mr. Reid expressed here."

"Oh, those are just the exaggerated, high-flown sentiments natural in a young man of his earnest-

ness of purpose. He will very soon tone down to less flighty judgments; and I am sure he would find Mr. Duff somewhat different from what he deems him to be if they came more into communication with each other. I think it would be worth while to send up a note asking Mr. Duff to meet him here at dinner to-morrow."

"My dear, he won't come. You may save yourself the trouble. He told me very plainly, after his last refusal, that a dinner without wine was a thing he could not face."

"Well, but I was thinking—there will be only Mr. Reid and himself here, and neither being total abstainers, would it not be well, I would almost say right, to relax a little, and provide some wine for them, just a little sherry and claret? There would be no need for us to touch it. In fact, I think such a proof of our not being unmindful that other people have a right to their own opinions as well as ourselves might have a beneficial influence."

"No, Bella," replied her husband in tones of unmistakable determination. "Such action would be gravely inconsistent with my attitude towards the temperance movement here. No wine shall appear at my table, nor, with my knowledge, enter my house. I have gone even further than my conscience quite approves, in allowing the production of Mr. Duff's flask at our early dinner."

Mrs. Crosbie hurled bitter thoughts in the direction of the Convalescent Home, and gave up an attempt she saw would be fruitless. So Arthur Reid, arriving cold and hungry after a rather long

enforced abstinence, on a raw, gloomy winter's day, had to aid the progress of digestion as best he might with limited draughts of soda-water; while Mrs. Crosbie fretted inwardly, the natural keenness of a woman's intuitions on such points rendering her well aware the situation was not favourable to the development of love's young dream. However, the young minister manifested no symptoms of annoyance, and he talked much to Ellen, who sat opposite to him, looking bright and fresh as usual.

Unlooked-for consolation was in store for the anxious mother. Dinner was hardly over when the door opened, and the servant announced Mr. Duff. Mrs. Crosbie's welcome was positively effusive. "I would have asked you to dinner," she said, "only I knew it was no use."

"No, no," replied the outspoken old distiller, who very thoroughly understood the privileges, in the way of saying rude things, which appertain, by common consent, to a rich old man without known relations. "Can't stand kickshaws and cold water. His stomach"—and he made a gesture towards Arthur Reid—"is young and strong, though he don't care much about it. But it would never do for an old man like me. And what a sight better both you and Crosbie would be if you took a glass of good sherry every day with your dinner. However, I like your coffee well enough, so I came in time for a cup. No, no, don't you go just yet. I want a talk with my young woman here."

He seated himself beside Ellen as he spoke.

Arthur Reid rather pointedly turned away, and began a discussion with Dr. Crosbie over some point raised at the Presbytery meeting. Mr. Duff talked for a little while to Mrs. Crosbie and her daughter, but he was shooting half-malicious glances across the table all the time.

"I say, look here, you fellows," he broke in at last, "you can talk shop some other time; I've a word to say to my young minister there. What's this you've been at, up in your parish, I should like to know? I'm a heritor, and have a right to ask questions. Murdering my servants, indeed! I object to pay a big part of the stipend of a minister who sets up such doings in his parish."

Mrs. Crosbie gave a little gasp, and Ellen flushed uneasily as she noticed the slight flash in the eye and firm setting of the mouth with which the young minister turned at the interruption.

"I am not aware, Mr. Duff," he said, "of having had a hand, either directly or indirectly, in murdering anyone."

"Why don't you teach your parishioners better?"

"As yet my opportunities have been limited of teaching them anything."

"You must have made good use of your time, then," retorted the old man, with a mocking smile. "As far as I can learn, no human being can remember such a thing as a murder in the parish of Glendarff; and now, before you've been among them six months, they fall to murdering my servants."

"My dear Mr. Duff, really!" remonstrated Mrs

Crosbie. Ellen, crimson to the roots of her hair, cast an imploring glance at Arthur Reid.

"Was Kelly your servant?" he asked in calmly measured tones.

"Of course, my gamekeeper. What else was he?"

Arthur Reid fixed his clear, steady eyes on the old man's face, and answered in the same quiet tones—

"The general impression in Glendarff seems to be that he was your master; and rumour is not slow to assign causes and consequences. Do you care to hear more?"

Mr. Duff palpably started, and changed colour slightly. But he rallied gallantly. "A likely enough bit of gossip," he said. "I believe, as a rule, gamekeepers are more their employers' masters than their servants. But Kelly wasn't that sort. He was only a watcher, after all. I ain't a sportsman."

"If you said he was a notorious poacher, you would be nearer the mark. The belief he had money hidden away seems to have been the cause of his death. If he didn't make that money in a worse way, he made it by selling your game."

"Oh, well, I really knew very little about him," the old man answered, with rather a cowed demeanour, evidently not relishing the turn the discussion was taking. "He was well recommended to me. I don't know much about what he had been before he came here."

Again the clear, steady glance compelled him to shift his eyes uneasily.

"If you require, or wish to know anything about his antecedents, you can hear quite enough from Inspector Welsh. He appears to have investigated them pretty thoroughly."

"I don't want to know anything about them," replied Mr. Duff rather sulkily. For some reason all desire to mock and banter seemed to be completely taken out of him. "Come, Nellie, my dear, you must give me a song. I must be going soon."

Gladly welcoming this diversion, Mrs. Crosbie rose. A brief interchange of signals passed between husband and wife, and Dr. Crosbie, without moving from the table, resumed the interrupted discussion with Arthur Reid. Not until his daughter's singing had come to an end, and been followed by sounds of departure from the hall, did he propose to go to the drawing-room.

"Well, my dear," he said to his wife, when they were alone, with a little malicious satisfaction, "I think you may be satisfied now; it was just as well Mr. Duff did not dine here this evening."

"What can it all mean?" queried Mrs. Crosbie. "I was never so surprised in my life."

"I don't in the least know what it means, but I know very well what it indicates. The two men cordially dislike each other, and I hope they will not meet here again."

Silenced and downcast, Mrs. Crosbie retired for the night. Yet, had she only known it, fickle fortune had been busy forwarding her schemes that evening. Arthur Reid was thinking of Ellen Crosbie when he fell asleep, and Mr. Duff, before

he fell asleep, thought a great deal about the young minister of Glendarff, though by no means with the paternal sentiments she wished he should entertain towards him. But certain vindictive sensations working strongly in his breast were more likely to further her designs than any amount of fatherly affection would have been in the least likely to do.

CHAPTER XI

A CATASTROPHE

ARTHUR REID fell asleep thinking of Ellen Crosbie. Further, he dreamed of her while he slept. Further still, during the early morning hours he lay awake thinking about her, so Mrs. Crosbie had more cause for satisfaction than she was herself aware. But his reflections were desultory, and without definite object. Matrimony, save in the case of a well-dowered wife, was not for him, so long as his mother lived. He only thought about Ellen Crosbie because she was something pleasant to think about. Although not possessed of actual beauty, she was far from being an unattractive girl to anyone whose admiration was not set upon elaborate veneering of both person and manner. She possessed a serene, happy temperament, and was thoroughly good-natured and unaffected, an admirable specimen of agreeable mediocrity. And mediocrity, after all, is perhaps a safer companion for daily life than less placid fellowship, with the brighter lights and deeper shadows, the rarer beauties and severer storms of more exalted natures. A very large majority of men are certainly safer, and probably

happier, with a wife whose aspirations do not stray beyond store closets, linen presses, and marital shirt buttons, than with one whose outlook is broader, her sympathies keener and deeper.

The common remark of Ellen Crosbie's friends was that she would make an excellent wife, and in his desultory meditations Arthur Reid endorsed that opinion. When a man propounds to himself, as a judgment based on calm reflection, the conclusion that a woman he is thinking about would make an excellent wife, he has clearly not reached an advanced stage of ardent passion. The nearest approach to a personal sentiment regarding the girl which the young minister had achieved was a certain irritation at seeing her display so much fondness for "that old rascal Duff."

Whether the young lady's dreams had been of the minister it would be indiscreet to ask. Her first question to her mother, after the departure of their guest the following day, certainly indicated that she had been both observant and reflective.

"Mamma, what did Mr. Reid mean by what he said to Mr. Duff last night?"

"About what?" asked Mrs. Crosbie, pretty certain what her daughter meant, but too wary to commit herself. It was just possible she and Ellen might be mentally at cross purposes, and had certain trifles which had startled herself escaped the girl's notice, it would be most unlucky should she, by a hasty reply, turn her attention to them.

"About Kelly being Mr. Duff's master, and about further rumours. It seemed such an odd thing to say, and I really thought Mr. Reid was

almost rude. I am sure Mr. Duff was very much put out. Did you notice his face while I was singing?"

"No, I did not observe anything particular about it," her mother replied, hoping she might be allowed to slide gently away from the main point by some side issue.

"He was frowning all the time, and there was such a dark, disagreeable look upon his face. I never saw him look like that before. I am sure he had not the least idea what I was singing. What could Mr. Reid mean?"

"Oh, well, my dear, when such a dreadful thing as a murder happens, there is always a perfect storm of rumour and gossip. Of course Mr. Reid is sure to hear it all, and I think what he said was just the result of a little bit of temper. Mr. Duff is rather fond of teasing people, and I don't think Mr. Reid quite understands his blunt ways. Besides, you know, Mr. Reid did express some rather exaggerated opinions the first time he dined here, and I daresay they have been repeated to Mr. Duff, and irritated him. They would lose nothing in the telling. I fancy the whole thing was just a little bit of temper on both sides."

"Well, I don't know," replied the girl. "Mr. Reid may have meant nothing, but I am quite sure that for some reason what he said annoyed Mr. Duff exceedingly."

"Possibly it may have done. People who like teasing do not always like to be paid back in their own coin. But I think you had beter go and finish putting the lining in your smoking-cap. Then you

can take it to Craigmore this afternoon. Willie can go with you. You have done it so beautifully it will be sure to put the old gentleman in a good humour."

Arthur Reid was chuckling a little to himself, as he walked home that day, but he was also reflecting. Old Mr. Duff was certainly either a very coarse, heavy joker, or his jokes, so far as they were levelled at himself, were bludgeons in disguise. At any rate, he had always the sensation, under their infliction, of being deliberately insulted, and his natural man strongly resented the fact. He felt he had scored heavily the previous evening. His counter thrust had been a far more effectual one than he had in the least expected. A most satisfactory circumstance, unquestionably. But why had it been so? It was very clear to him his words had meant a great deal more for Mr. Duff than they had meant for himself. He had merely, as far as intention went, cast back some wild and absurd rumours that were afloat, as a return missile for the old man's coarse banter, without a suspicion of any foundation of truth in them, beyond the suggestion he had thrown out that Mr. Duff knew more of Kelly's antecedents than he chose to avow. Why the missile should prove so heavy a one, he was quite at a loss to understand.

The recent gossip of Glendarff concerning the murder had been even more wildly ridiculous than is usual in such cases, and it had not escaped the notice of both the minister and Dr. Munro that it had burst suddenly forth in full bloom immediately after the return of Millroy to the

village. Peter Kelly, according to current theory, though nominally Mr. Duff's servant, was really his master, by reason of certain knowledge he possessed, which it was important to Mr. Duff should not become publicly known. Kelly had consequently, after filling no one knew exactly what position in regard to the old man, been pensioned in discreet retirement, and for reasons of his own had thought it prudent, for a time, to abide quietly in the wilderness, and raid his patron's game. Of late, however, he had grown restive and troublesome, and there had been some stormy scenes between him and Mr. Duff. Who that has had any experience of the tendency and growth of gossip could doubt what the next development of the story would be? There had been trafficking between Mr. Duff and Murphy. A fellow-workman, going over the hill to Netherport, had seen Murphy coming from the direction of Craigmore. Was it in the least likely that he, for the mere chance of an uncertain sum of money hidden about Kelly's house, would have forfeited such a profitable source of income as the poaching transactions between them? Was it not even less likely that anything save solid and certain profit would have induced strangers to be his accomplices in the murder of this troublesome pensioner? In Glendarff a clear case against Mr. Duff was held to be proved to the hilt, and much blame was laid upon the supineness of the police in not having already provided the neighbourhood with a startling sensation in the arrest of Mr. Duff for complicity in the murder. To the minister and Dr. Munro these rumours had

only suggested that the doctor's doubts about Millroy's dull-wittedness had considerable justification, and to Arthur Reid it was matter for no little surprise that his hints had told so heavily on his ancient banterer.

On reaching home, the minister found that old Mr. Davidson had been in search of him, and had left a request that he would be sure to go and have tea at Glendyne. "He said he was just particular anxious to see you, sir," the housekeeper said. "He's heard something he wants to tell ye."

There being no impediment in the way, Arthur Reid started in good time for Glendyne, and on the road fell in with Dr. Munro, also thither bound.

"It seems the old gentleman has picked up some wonderful piece of information," the minister said. "Do you know anything about it?"

"Oh yes," replied Dr. Munro impatiently. "A regular mare's nest! I met Agnes just now, going home from practising in the church, and she told me. He has picked up some crackbrained story from a shepherd, I believe, that it wasn't Kelly who was murdered at all,—that the whole thing was a plant, to let him get clear off, because of some serious accusation hanging over him. I hadn't time to hear all the story. I must stop a moment here. I have a patient to see. Go on; I'll follow you shortly."

The minister pursued his way to Glendarff alone. Margaret Kisson was apparently on the watch for him, for she opened the door before he had time to ring the bell.

"Wad ye speak a word, sir?" she said, and without waiting for a reply, she led the way to a small sitting-room near the kitchen, and placed a chair for him.

"More mysteries," thought the minister to himself. "Why, the place is bewitched. Well, Mrs. Kissock, what is it?" he asked, seeing that she seemed rather embarrassed.

"It's just about Miss Agnes, sir. She's no' vera weel, an' I'm sure she sudna gang to the kirk on Sabbath. Could ye no' get Miss Tomlinson to play for the singers?"

"Easily, if Miss Davidson wishes it. But I must have some communication from her, you know."

"Could ye no' mak' out, some way, that Miss Tomlinson wanted to play, an' ask Miss Agnes to gie it up to her for the day? She'll no' gie up gangin' o' hersel'."

"Really, Mrs. Kissock," said the minister, with some little irritation, "I think you must see you are asking me to do an impossible thing. If you think Miss Davidson is not well, and should not venture out, you had better speak to Dr. Munro. I daresay if he advised her remaining at home she would consent; and, at least, I could then urge her to do so, and promise to arrange with Miss Tomlinson. But I really cannot begin on the subject with Miss Davidson."

"It's nae gude sayin' onything to him. Doctors aye want to ken just what's the matter, and I couldna vera weel say that mysel'. It may be she's gotten a bit chill, but she's naethin' mair than just pale an' dull, an' wi' nae mind to do onything. She

does tak' thae sort o' turns whiles, an' then it's aye best for her to stop at hame."

"Hysteria," said the acute and competent critic once more to himself, and his soul grew dark with gloomy reflections. What if the girl should go into a violent fit of hysterics in church? The situation would be appalling, under the peculiar conditions of Glendarff. Dr. Munro's presence at the service was always very uncertain, and old Mr. Davidson never came to church by any chance. The wives and mothers of the village rarely put in an appearance at the morning service, so the female portion of the congregation consisted chiefly of very old women and young girls. Moreover, there being no Mrs. Mackenzie, Munro, or Reid, there was no one able to assume, with the laird's daughter, the amount of firmness and authority which would be demanded by such terrific circumstances. An awful vision arose before him of himself, in all the solemn dignity of ecclesiastical raiment, carrying a kicking and screeching young woman out of the church, amidst the excited giggling of the schoolgirls and the gleeful chuckling of the schoolboys. An exaggerated picture, verily, born of sheer terror, but none the less it sent a cold shiver through him, and prompted his reply.

"Well, really, I do not understand why you apply to me. It is clear there is nothing I can do. If you can neither get Dr. Munro to persuade Miss Davidson to stay at home, nor do it yourself, the only course for you is to be sure and accompany her."

"Eh, minister, but I canna gang to the kirk in the mornin'. The laird maun aye hae his hot dinner, whatever. Things maun just tak' their chance. But I wish ye could hae hindered it."

Dr. Munro's ring summoned her away at the moment, and Arthur Reid, muttering uncomplimentary remarks to himself on her futile fussiness, proceeded to join his host and hostess.

His attention naturally concentrated itself on his hostess, but there seemed very little in her to observe. Her manner was a slight exaggeration of her ordinary apathetic listlessness. There was not a symptom of that flighty excitability which once, and only once, in the course of their acquaintance, had presented her in such an unwonted light. She made monosyllabic replies to direct observations, and sometimes smiled faintly, but did not further concern herself with what was going on around her. In truth, she was not called upon to exert herself in entertaining her guests, for old Mr. Davidson was far too full of his newly-discovered theory regarding the death of Kelly to allow any other subject to hold the field.

"There's nae twa ways about it," he said. "Mossend's shepherd is just a particular sharp fellow, an' he says it was no' Kelly ava that was killed. It was just a poacher chap that had been out wi' them, an' he fell ower a rock an' smashed his skull. Then Kelly, being in trouble, took the chance to get off that way. An' that was how they came to burn the house, so as the truth mightna be found out."

"Having first got me over to examine the

body?" said Dr. Munro, striving to hold down his irritation with the frail bands of his slender deference for his future father-in-law. "My dear sir, the notion is simply absurd. The three points to which I could swear most unhesitatingly are: that the body was that of Kelly; that he had not been killed by falling over a rock; and that when I saw him he had not been dead more than five or six hours. To say nothing of what I overheard in the cavern."

"I dinna care what ye heard, and ye can swear what ye please. But I'll lay it's as I say. Havena bodies been identified times ower, an' the person turned up all right afterwards?"

"Yes, when identification has taken place a long time after death, or after great disfigurement; not under the circumstances in which I saw Kelly's body. The whole thing is ridiculous. I am not more certain that I am talking to you at this moment, than that the murdered man whom I examined was Kelly."

The old man stuck pertinaciously to his point all the same, and, with a half-impatient shrug, Dr. Munro turned to Agnes—

"You are very quiet to-night, little mouse! Have you a headache?"

"No, my head doesn't ache. I feel a little tired. I think it must be the practising," she answered.

Now was the only chance. Arthur Reid struck in at once. "I am afraid you must have found the church very cold, Miss Davidson. You look to me very much as if you had been greatly chilled. If you feel any ill effects, I hope you

will not think of coming to church on Sunday. Miss Tomlinson will play for you."

It seemed a feeble sort of speech, and likely to prove as abortive as feeble. The girl replied with more animation of manner than she had yet shown, waxing energetic in the very place where indolence would have been a boon. "Oh dear no! I haven't any cold. I shall be quite ready to play on Sunday. I like doing it. I should be quite disappointed if I couldn't play."

Vainly did the minister hope his companion would say something on the road home which might enable him to suggest that Miss Davidson looked far from well and would be better at home on Sunday, as the weather was damp and chilly. Dr. Munro was quite taken up with the old man's absurd idea.

"I believe," he said, "Millroy has set that story going to confuse the situation. Small wonder it is so difficult to trace out a murder, when all these ridiculous reports come flying in, and have, perforce, to be examined into. The true thread cannot but get tangled up with, and probably broken amidst all these cross ones."

The remainder of the week was a heavy time for the minister, oppressed by a dim perception, of which he was hardly himself fully conscious, that Margaret Kisson had meant a good deal more than she said, and that her anxiety Agnes Davidson should not occupy her place at the harmonium on Sunday was due to something more weighty than the fussiness of an old nurse. The coming Sunday hung like a black cloud over

him, and when at length the day came, he felt so nervous that he took the precaution, when starting for church, to thrust into his pocket a written sermon, as a prop and stay in case of any unforeseen disaster. When the bell stopped, however, the sounds which came at once from the harmonium were of a strictly normal character, and the first person on whom his eyes fell as he came out of the vestry was Dr. Munro, seated in his usual place. Feeling himself thus rescued from all trace of responsibility, the minister's spirits rose with a sudden bound, and he began to think he had been rather a fool to allow nervous apprehensions to take such an effect upon him; so different is the aspect of a danger viewed from the rear, to that presented by a front view of it. By the time the choir had begun to sing the hymn preceding the sermon he had forgotten all about his terrors, and was able to give whole and undivided attention to the subject of his intended discourse, the first of a series on the Christian armour. In the pulpit Bible, open at the last chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, lay the single sheet of notepaper on which were written the few headings of that day's subject. Armour in general—its uses—offensive and defensive. Illustrations from different periods of the world's history. Parallel between things spiritual and things temporal. He was arranging his opening sentences in his mind—the choir were singing a paraphrase. They began the last verse—

“That to perfection's sacred height,”

but they never finished it; neither were any

sentences of that particular sermon uttered on that day. The first line of the verse quavered away in a tremulous cadence of strange sounds, as the accompaniment expired with that dismal groan with which a harmonium announces that all the wind has gone out of it. The startled minister looked up, and a telling opening phrase vanished beyond recall. Dr. Munro was just starting from his seat, as Miss Davidson, a strange ghastly colour, and quite unconscious, slid down on the floor from the arms of the frightened choir-girls, who had been able to break her fall, though not to support her. There was a moment of excited confusion. Then the insensible girl was borne off to the vestry by Dr. Munro and Dempster, followed by Mrs. Dempster. The alarmed congregation looked up at the minister, as if for direction.

"If you will sit down for a moment," he said, "I will ascertain whether it is desirable to close the service at once." And he left the pulpit. In the small entry between the church and vestry Dr. Munro came to him.

"On no account stop the service," he said. "She is coming round rapidly. By all means keep them all here, till we have time to get her quietly away."

So the minister's useful second string came into play, and the clearly written sermon, which in his first days as a preacher he had been wont to carry about, in case of a sudden attack of that mental paralysis which results from nervous panic, was read to a congregation of which probably not one

in ten paid the slightest attention to it. However, it served its purpose. By the time service was over, and eyes and tongues let loose, a carriage of some sort had been procured, and Agnes Davidson conveyed to her home by that rough and circuitous route by which alone a wheeled vehicle could safely approach the abode of her ancestors.

CHAPTER XII

REVELATIONS

THAT Sunday was a glorious day for the Dempsters. The amount of tea and solid refreshment at the disposal of Mrs. Dempster would have floated and freighted a moderate-sized barge; while as for Mr. Dempster, notwithstanding some trenchant warnings from his spouse, by the time the hour for evening service was drawing near, his spasms had reached such alarming severity that he was forced to send his son, an intelligent lad of about seventeen years of age, to inform the minister of his father's suffering condition, and crave leave to be his representative in the church—a task which the son, a truthful, straightforward young fellow, did not accomplish without a good deal of colouring and stammering. But he was a strange sort of man, this minister, as the puzzled messenger afterwards confided to his mother.

“They say he’s that set against drink he wadna touch a bawbee belongin’ to auld Duff for onything ye could gie him, just because it’s a’ made out o’ the drink. Yet though I ken fine he knew as weel as I did mysel’ what was wrang wi’ faither, he only gave a bit smile, and said he was sorry he couldna

come to the kirk, but I wad do vera weel. That's no' the way wi' the maist o' thae teetotalin' folk."

Mr. Dempster had, of course, but little to tell regarding the catastrophe of the morning, beyond describing vividly the "awfu' blae" colour of the young lady, and the strange "shudderin' moan" she gave as they were carrying her into the vestry; for after discharging that service he had been instantly turned out by his wife, and shortly after sent in search of a conveyance, to which Miss Davidson had been able to walk, with the support of Dr. Munro's arm. But Mrs. Dempster, smarting under the sense of a personal slight, was disposed to take a very grave view of the situation. Mrs. Kissock had been "just extraordinar' ill-bred." She had promptly dispensed with Mrs. Dempster's services, saying she knew quite well what to do, and did not require assistance from anyone.

"Now, it's my opinion," said Mrs. Dempster, "it was just a fit the young leddy took, an' that she's had them before. If no', how would yon auld besom ken sae weel what to do, and no' be thankfu' for the help o' a mother, that's reared a big family, an' brought them through teethin' convulsions, an' a hantle ither troubles, an' she never had a bairn o' her ain? No, Mistress Nichol, I'm no' forgettin'. Barbara Kissock wasna her wean ava. John Kissock was twice marriest, an' Barbara was the first wife's wean. But, as I was sayin', fits like yon wad just account for the young leddy bein' aye sae dull an' quiet-like, for they're a terrible commandin' thing. An' they aye come to

tell sair on the mind sooner or later. I'll no' sae but the doctor wad be wise to think twice afore ever he gangs through wi' that marriage."

The duties of the day kept Arthur Reid pretty closely tied until after the evening service. Then he went in search of Dr. Munro, to make inquiries regarding the patient. He found the doctor just returned from a visit to Glendyne, looking more anxious and harassed than his report appeared to warrant.

"Aggie is all right now," he said. "She only feels a little weak and shaken, but she will soon rally from that."

"Then you do not consider the attack serious?"

"That is a question I cannot quite answer. I am greatly puzzled by it."

"Was it anything more than an ordinary fainting fit?" the minister asked, discreetly suppressing any surmises of his own upon the subject.

"Most decidedly it was. It was some one of those seizures which are roughly generalised as 'fits.' But I am rather at a loss as to the diagnosis. I fancied I caught traces of some not very common symptoms. But she recovered so instantly, I had really no time to make any examination. She was fully conscious by the time we laid her down, and as she, of course, quite imagined she had merely fainted, it would have been most imprudent to appear to be searching for any symptoms of a more serious attack."

"I trust that the case is not likely to prove a grave one?"

"There is nothing that points to any such risk,

and yet— Confound it, Reid, there is something wrong about that house!”

“Ah!” exclaimed the startled minister. “What gives you that idea?”

“That is just what I can hardly tell you. Aggie assures me she never fainted in her life before, and that she has not been at all out of health of late. Yet I could swear that old woman was not in the least surprised when we drove up to the house. If ever there was written upon a woman’s face, ‘Just what I expected,’ it was written upon hers, when she came to the door. She was as quiet and ready with everything wanted as if it was quite an every-day occurrence. I wanted Aggie to have a little brandy, which she was very averse to touching. The old woman at once said, most decidedly, it never suited her, and she would be much better without it, just as if she spoke from experience. Yet when I questioned her afterwards, she stuck to it Aggie had never had such an attack before, and had always had good health. I felt certain, all the time, she was holding back something.”

“I think there cannot be much doubt you are in the right there,” said Arthur Reid. And then he told Dr. Munro of the curious incident of the preceding week.

“Why in the world did you not tell me that at the time?” exclaimed the doctor sharply.

“My good fellow, you are looking at the subject in the light thrown upon it by Miss Davidson’s illness to-day. How, as the case stood last week, could I, at the instance of a mere servant, interfere about any matter concerning her health?”

"That is true enough. The fact is, Reid, the want of a mother at Glendyne, or of some lady in her position, is a monstrous difficulty, which is not lessened by my relations to the house. It is an awkward business for two young fellows like you and me to tackle. But you'll have to help me."

"I? How?"

"Well, I must get to the bottom of the business, that is clear. It will not do for me to treat her in this sort of state of uncertainty. It will be quite in ordinary course that you should call to-morrow to inquire. Go there with me, and wait, as though we were going farther together. After I have seen Aggie, I will have it out with the old woman; and if she will not speak out, I will confront her with you, and insist on her explaining what she feared. You see, there is a certain discrepancy between what she said to you and what she says to me."

Arthur Reid readily acceded to this proposition, and an appointment was made for the next day. But the common disarranger of doctors' plans intervened. About breakfast-time Dr. Munro appeared at the manse, evidently equipped for a long expedition.

"I've had a message this morning," he said, "to go to a shepherd's wife over the hills, and I fully expect I shall have to remain there the whole night. I sent off a messenger at once to Glendyne, and Aggie writes that she is much better, has had a comfortable night, and that I need not feel the least uneasiness about her."

"Then am I to understand our visit is postponed *sine die*?"

"By no means. This sudden amendment rather puzzles me. I fully expected she would feel out of sorts for several days. I am more than ever anxious to get at the rights of the case. Let our appointment stand for Wednesday, instead of to-day."

Dr. Munro's forebodings were fully justified. He did not reappear in Glendarff until late the following afternoon. The next day he and the minister set out for Glendyne. Dr. Munro, after ringing the bell, turned on the doorstep, and with his back to the house, was speaking to the minister, when the door opened. The startled change in his companion's expression made him turn hastily. Margaret Kissock was standing in the doorway, worn and haggard, with a hard, resolute look upon her rugged face.

"Is Miss Davidson worse?" the doctor hastily asked.

"I think she's about her usual, sir," was the somewhat enigmatical reply. "But ye'se best gang an' see for yersel' what ye think. She's restin' on the sofa in the drawin'-room. If ye'll come ben wi' me, minister, to the wee sittin'-room, the doctor can come to us there, when he's seen Miss Agnes."

The woman's manner was much more that of a person issuing orders than of one making suggestion, and her whole demeanour was suggestive of some grave crisis. The two men glanced at each other in mingled surprise and alarm. Then, without speaking, Dr. Munro walked towards the drawing-room, while the minister followed his conductress, as requested, or directed, to the small sitting-room at the back of the house. She held

the door open for him to pass, and followed him herself into the room. Then suddenly casting off her grave, subdued demeanour, she seated herself on the nearest chair, and pressing her handkerchief to her eyes, wept bitterly.

"Oh, minister, minister!" she sobbed, "my heart's just like to brak' the day. But it's nae gude haudin' back ony mair. But oh! I'm wae for them baith; an' what'll be the end o't I canna tell."

Arthur Reid was silent for a moment, perplexed by conflicting fears of seeming, on the one hand, indifferent concerning some evident call for keen sympathy; on the other, too ready to make inquisition into matters connected with Miss Davidson's health. His answer, at last, was suggested by the woman's own words.

"If you are holding back anything connected with Miss Davidson's health from Dr. Munro," he said, "you are certainly acting most injudiciously. I know he is a good deal puzzled by that attack on Sunday. You might probably aid him much by speaking out."

"There's nae haudin' back now. He kens fine a' he'll need to ken the now, an' he'll no' be lang till he's here. Eh, minister, but I wad hae thought ye might hae jaloused."

"Jaloused what?"

"Did nae thought come to ye that day ye cam' an' saw her about playin' in the kirk again? That day I tauld ye she wasna quite weel?"

"Well, I did fancy then she was perhaps a little inclined to be hysterical. Is that what is wrong?"

"Hysterics? Na, na; if ever she had hysterics, it's frae a cause. Man, it's just drink, an' naethin' else."

Arthur Reid turned ghastly white, and for a moment sat staring at his companion in speechless amazement.

"*Drink?*" he repeated at last. "Woman, are you raving?"

"'Deed an' I wish I was! Little dae ye ken! Puir lassie, ye maunna think hardly o' her."

The minister started from his seat and took one or two turns up and down the narrow limits of the room in his agitation, as all which had so perplexed both his friend and himself seemed, in the light of that one deadly word, to fall into the ranks of natural and inevitable sequences. "Horrible! horrible!" he murmured. "But are you quite certain?" he added more audibly, clutching wildly at the forlorn hope that an imperfectly educated woman might have drawn erroneous deductions from symptoms produced by some obscure and, as yet, imperfectly developed malady.

"Certain?" she repeated bitterly. "Just bide a wee, till the doctor comes, then I'll tell ye. I'm proud ye are wi' him the day. He'll need a' the help ye can gie him, puir body! She's just extra bad the morn, an' canna haud up her heid ava. After what happened on the Sabbath, I kent it was nae use haudin' back ony mair; sae when I saw ye baith comin', I made up my mind I wad just let him see her, an' then tell him a'. Whisht! he's comin'!"

Hasty footsteps drew near. The door opened

abruptly, and Dr. Munro, with a face more ghastly than the minister's had turned when he heard the fatal word, almost staggered into the room. "Oh, my God!" he exclaimed in a hoarse tone, as he sank into a chair. The faithful old servant, now quite composed, looked sadly at him for a moment in silence. Then she spoke—

"Ay, doctor, ye ken a' now, an' my heart's sair for ye. Maybe ye're thinkin' I was wrang no' to speak sooner. But what could I do? I'm but a servant, an' it wasna for me to betray them whose bread I eat, sae lang as the thing might be hidden."

"You should have told me," he said in a voice that shook audibly. "Doctors are different from other people. How long has it been going on? How did I never see anything of it? If I had known, I might have done something. It is most important this sort of thing should be treated at once, before it grows into a confirmed habit."

"Ay, that's so. An' it was born in her."

"Born in her?"

"Ay, that was it. To get at the first o't, ye maun hae gane back, I ken na how far. But I ken it was in her mither, and her gran'mither afore her. But how has she hidden it from me?"

"Man, do ye ken the cunnin' o' them it's born in? Ye'd no' hae seen what ye have seen, if she hadn't made sure ye'd no' be here the day. Someone tauld her Mistress Hall had been awfu' bad, an' ye'd no' could win hame till late the night. Little do ye ken what it's been! When she was nae mair than a lassie in short frocks I had to keep watch on her. No' that she kent then what

it was to tak' ower muckle; but she was that fond o' the taste o' wine or spirits, if there was a wee drap left in a glass frae which onyone had been drinkin', she'd suck it down like sugar. I've prayed the laird, wi' tears, to keep guard on't, but he wad ne'er believe the danger, and sae it's just creepit on by degrees. It's no' to say she tak's it reg'lar, but just by fits and starts, maistly when onything excites her greatly. I aye hopit when I saw ye were courtin' her, it might get her aff it, for the livin' aye in this eerie auld house is maist enough to mak' ony young thing gae wrang that way. An' I think, for a while, the dreed ye might find it out keepit her mair carefu'. But the beginnin' to play in the kirk again upset her a bit, an' what's dune it the now is the state she got in about yer bein' sae near murdered. She's been gey bad this time, an' that was why I spoke to the minister. I feared what might happen in the kirk; but I never kent her to hae a fit like yon before."

"Good God!" murmured Dr. Munro again, wiping the drops from his pallid brow. "But she is young. She may be saved yet."

"*She's* young, but *it* isn't. It's into the third generation wi' her. Her mither and her gran'-mither were just the same."

"How do you know?"

"How wad I not know, when I hae been wi' the family these fifty years, an' kent them before that? Her gran'faither was Mr. Brodie, him that was minister here before auld Dr. Simpson. He was a gude man, an' a grand preacher. Folk aye said he might have been ane o' the highest ministers in the

Kirk if he hadna come awa' to sic an out-o'-the-world sort o' place as this. An' it was because o' his wife—that's Miss Agnes's gran'mither—he did. She was awfu' at the drink. My sister, that's aulder than me, was servant to them before Miss Annie—that's Miss Agnes's mither—was born; an' she said when she was expectin' the wean she was neither to haud nor to bind. Mr. Brodie tried ae thing after anither to keep it frae her, an' at last he cam' here, thinkin' in sic a quiet place things might be better. I cam' here wi' them, a lassie o' fifteen. Miss Annie was just ten years auld then. The mistress wasna a haet better after she cam' here, an' I ken fine she gave drink to Miss Annie herself when she was but a bairn. She died when Miss Annie was about twenty, and that was just when I marriet Rob Kissock; but I was aye about the house, an' just went back when my man died. Miss Annie grew worse after her mither died, an' she'd a'things in her ain han's. Eh, sirs! but the times I've had wi' her whiles! I'd ne'er hae tholed it but for the auld minister's sake. He was a guid, kind auld man, an' fair heart-broken wi' his troubles. Miss Annie was nigh on thirty-seven when she marriet the laird. Her faither was fair an' straight wi' him, an' tauld him the truth, but he made light o't, and said he'd nae doubt, down here, awa' frae the village, she'd be easy kept frae it, but I ken fine it was for the sake o' the siller he didna heed it. He thocht she wad hae had mair than she got. Her faither wad hae me to gang wi' her, an' he died sune after. She was just like her mither, extra bad when she was expectin' the wean. Eh, but

that was an awfu' time! I thank God she never had another, an' she died when Miss Agnes was five years auld. I watched ower the puir wee thing a' I was fit, but fine I kent how it wad be, sooner or later. It's the sins o' the faithers to the third an' fourth generation. She's the third, an' I pray God there may never be a fourth."

No amount of rhetorical skill could have lent more pathos to the pitiful tale than did the vibration of deep feeling in the voice of the homely but fluent speaker. A dead silence followed. Whatever might have been the past history of the gloomy old house, it had never surely been the scene of a sadder tragedy than that now approaching a climax within its massive walls! In the one room, the unhappy victim of the inherited curse, stretched upon a sofa, in the deep slumber into which she had sunk when her affianced husband fled horror-stricken from the awful revelation contained in her flushed face, poisoned breath, wandering replies, and thick, incoherent utterances. In the other room, the grief-stricken narrator of her sad history, and the auditors, bowed down with feelings almost of shame and humiliation, because they were men, and the tale of woe and disgrace was told of a woman.

Dr. Munro sat silent, his face buried in his hands, the extent of his agitation betrayed by the tremor which now and again shook him from head to foot. The minister's white face was very calm, almost rigid in its stern composure. A nature in which manly strength and womanly tenderness were strangely blended was stirred to its inmost

depths by a full and vivid comprehension of the character and duration of the scathing ordeal on which his stricken friend was but just entering, and the consciousness that with himself alone lay the power to render him aid.

At length, silently rising, he laid his hand gently on the doctor's shoulder. "Pull yourself together, Munro," he said. "Remember that, for the moment, you have to think and act for her only. You must not, especially when leaving this house, betray the least symptom of unusual agitation, or every idle tongue in the village will be in full cry upon the scent before many minutes are over. Come home with me. I think"—and he glanced inquiringly at Margaret Kissock—"we cannot at present be of any further use here?"

"No, indeed, sir. There's naethin' ye can do. In truth it wad be best ye were baith awa', before she begins to stir hersel'."

"Come, then, Munro. For her sake, man, put out your utmost strength."

Dr. Munro raised his head at the gentle but authoritative tone, and with a long shiver, drew himself together and rose. The minister took his arm. "I will see you again shortly," he said to Mrs. Kissock, and then they left the house.

Not a word was said until they had crossed the bridge and were well on their way towards the entrance-gate of Glendyne. But Arthur Reid's perplexity increased with every moment. Dr. Munro plodded along beside him, with a dull, heavy tread, and drooping, dejected manner. The entrance to Glendyne was not many hundred

yards beyond the village. His exit in such a mood from its precincts was not to be risked for a moment. Cruel as would be the pain it would cost himself, he must, even were it by the use of stinging words, rouse him into making the necessary effort for a more composed demeanour. He was on the point of speaking, when Dr. Munro abruptly halted, and spoke.

"It's no use, Reid. I dare not show myself in the village just now. I must have a little time. You won't mind a bit of a scramble, will you? Through the fields here, we can get into my garden, and so avoid being seen altogether."

With a sensation of enormous relief, the minister followed his companion through a small plantation, across sundry fields, and over various fences and ditches, until at last they forced themselves through a straggling hedge into the garden behind Dr. Munro's house. When they reached the sitting-room, Dr. Munro sank down on a chair with the air of a man thoroughly prostrate.

"Now tell me, old fellow," the minister said, "what I shall do. Shall I stay with you, or shall I leave you to yourself for the present, and return in the evening?"

"Leave me, Reid. I think I shall be better alone just now. I must try to think. Thank Heaven, I have no need to go out this afternoon. But do not return here, I would rather join you at the manse in the evening; and thank you a thousand times."

With a strong, silent clasp of the hands they parted. The arrangement exactly suited the minister's purposes. He knew it was a regular

habit of old Mr. Davidson to go out towards the darkening and take a look round the farm. When the light began to wane, therefore, he made his way once more to Glendyne, but this time by the back road, and entering at the kitchen entrance, he found Margaret Kissock, as he expected, alone in the kitchen. She led the way at once to the small sitting-room.

"An' how is the doctor now, puir soul?" she asked.

"He seems terribly shaken, poor fellow. He is coming to talk to me at the manse this evening. So I was anxious to see you first. Now, Mrs. Kissock, what am I to say to him?"

She did not ask for any more definite statement of what he meant. There could be but the one momentous question in the thoughts of any one of the three at that instant. With a certain tremulous energy of tone, she answered—

"It canna be, minister. He maunna marry her, whatever."

"You mean that you, knowing all the past history of the family, deem it an absolutely hopeless case?"

"That do I, sir, or never wad I hae let it out. When I found the dread o' his findin' out about it had lost the power to haud her back frae rinnin' the risk, I kent it was clean hopeless. It wad be a downright sin for ony man to marry her, puir lassie. She wad just gang the way o' her mither an' gran'mither before her; an' ony wean she might chance to hae wad be as bad as hersel'."

"But what will be the result to her of the marriage being broken off?"

Margaret Kissonock shook her head, and answered with a certain touch of homely dignity. "It's no' for us to think about that, minister. We're but puir, short-sighted mortals, an' like enough, the end, as it is, may be clean different frae what we're thinkin'. When the right an' wrang o' a matter's clear, we maun leave results wi' Him that made the right an' wrang. There's nae need to ask which is right, an' which is wrang, when it's a question o' riskin' the bringin' into the world o' innocent weans wi' a curse on them they canna escape. The curse maun die wi' her."

"But she? Does she remember? Does she understand that he knows all now?"

"That I canna quite tell ye, sir. She sleepit soun' until nigh on twae o'clock. Then I waukened her up, an' got her to tak' some soup, an' gang awa' to her bed. Of course she's a bit dazed yet, but there's somethin' about her I canna just mak' out, no' just like her ordinar' when she's comin' roon'. Whiles I fancy she does remember his comin', an' understands he must ken a' now. But I'll likely be able to judge better in the morning."

"Very well. I shall tell Dr. Munro all you have said, and I think it is very probable he may consult you as to the exact method of proceeding. I shall advise him to do so."

"As ye please, sir. There's just the ae thing certain. She maun never, never hae a wean."

CHAPTER XIII

ANXIETY

WHAT were the true sentiments of Hector Munro towards the unhappy girl whom it was only too evident he must relinquish all thought of making his wife? His own uncertainty on that point seemed to Arthur Reid, as he first strove to disentangle the confusion of thoughts which crowded into his mind, to complicate the difficulty of the task which lay before him. He had to— What? He was not himself quite certain. Was he called upon by his bounden duty, as minister, as citizen, as friend, to urge the man with whom lay the necessity for action, to face a heart-breaking sorrow, rather than run the risk of prolonging into another generation this terrible heritage, at the moment showing itself as a tendency to degrading self-indulgence, but which might, at any moment, assume the more deadly aspect of mental aberration, or irresistible impulse to crime? Or was it his task to convince him that a course not specially distressing to his feelings, only repugnant to all sentiments of chivalry and honour, was strenuously demanded from him by the higher claims of righteousness and good citizenship? Was Agnes

Davidson the girl he would have chosen had his choice been wholly unswayed by a not discreditable desire to secure through his marriage the chance of professional advancement? It was difficult to believe it, yet the minister had sometimes thought he detected slight signs that the listless, uninteresting girl had a stronger hold on her lover's heart than he had at first deemed possible. In any case, Hector Munro had given him many proofs of the possession of an honourable, upright disposition, to which the necessity laid upon him could not but be rendered exquisitely painful by the almost certain result that the line of action from which there was no alternative would tend gravely to aggravate the very evil which forced him to adopt it.

Yet, after all, mature reflection brought him to the opinion that the knowledge he longed for possessed less importance than at the first moment he had been inclined to attribute to it. The only fitting attitude for himself was the assumption of an amount of affection, on Dr. Munro's part, for his intended wife, which would render the situation extremely distressing to him, and the arguments which met the one hypothesis were equally valid as against the other.

It was late when Dr. Munro reached the manse, somewhat recovered from the staggering effect of the shock he had received, but looking very worn and haggard. He greeted his host but scantily, and seating himself by the fire, with his elbows resting on his knees, and his hands extended towards the cheerful blaze, he said—

"Now, no preliminary fencing, Reid, with this, that, and the other triviality. I couldn't stand it. There are just two things I have to settle, and I want your help towards settling them. What am I to do? and how am I to do it? I wonder if ever man was thrust into such a cruel predicament?"

"Never into a crueller one, I believe. But I do not think, Munro, there is room for a moment's doubt as to what you have to do."

"Don't you? I do not feel by any means so certain on that point."

"That is only because you are personally interested in the decision, my friend; and strong personal feeling has always a tendency to press on the eyeballs of one's judgment and distort the object of one's vision. If you could only, for a few moments, imagine yourself in the position of a medical man, called upon to pronounce a purely professional opinion, you would not take long to make up your mind."

"I see quite well what your opinion is. But then, just because of my professional knowledge, there is a great deal clear to me which is beyond your range of vision. I can estimate, as you cannot, the probable results to her of my following the course you approve; and, by Heaven, I am not certain that the thing having gone so far, I am not bound in honour to go on and run the risk of everything, rather than render certain the wreck and ruin I foresee as the result of my shirking the responsibility."

The minister did not reply for a few moments. Then, very quietly, he asked—

"Have you in view a marriage absolutely certain of being unfollowed by the birth of children?"

Dr. Munro perceptibly winced. "Of course not," he replied a little sharply.

"Exactly. I do not need medical training to be fully aware how, thus, disaster would be rendered doubly disastrous. But there lies the crucial point of the case, and the one which carries it over the boundary from your domain, the physical one, into mine, the moral one. The medical aspects and probable results of your action are quite beside the mark as determining circumstances. They would, of course, influence your methods of procedure; but as to your action, that is purely a moral consideration, and, unhesitatingly, I say you would be guilty of a great sin if you carried out this marriage."

"Is it a great sin to run the risk of laying a tremendous burden on your own life, in order to avoid an almost certainty of bringing utter ruin on another life? I have heard very different teaching from your lips, Reid."

"You never certainly heard me do otherwise than assert the bounden duty of every man who ranges himself under the banner of Christ to take upon himself any amount of suffering by means of which he may lighten that of others. But that is not the case before us now. You are shirking the question. I do not pretend to instruct you on such questions as heredity, but every man not wholly uneducated knows the terribly cumulative power of the special evil we have in view—how

with each succeeding generation, the temptation grows stronger, the moral force to combat it weaker. It is into the third generation now. Are you prepared to take upon yourself the moral responsibility of transmitting it to a fourth generation?"

Dr. Munro shifted his position uneasily. "Would you speak so strongly if you were counselling a woman who was thinking of marrying a man who drank heavily, or would you urge her to go in and reform him? It seems to me it is always the women who are kicked down."

"God forbid. But one cannot answer a vague general question like yours, any more than you could prescribe for a patient merely from knowing he had, say, smallpox, without examining into his special case. That sweeping together of all cases of intemperance into one common class is about the most mischievous of the many fallacies which render so useless most of the efforts made to deal with the evil. But this much may be said. The evil—disease, if you like—almost, if not absolutely always, appears in its worst form in women—secret drinking for pure love of it. Moreover, I think you will allow the children of a father who drank would have a better chance than where the tendency lay with the mother; especially when, as in this case, the craving has always been particularly strong immediately before the birth of children. Even further, it might be urged that save among the very poorest of our population, the moral evil results of a father's

intemperance might be entirely kept away from the children until they were well past infancy; whereas the children of a drunken mother are steeped in an atmosphere of moral degradation from the cradle. Munro, you cannot do this thing. Think of the annals of your own profession! Drink—epilepsy—crime! What crime a man could commit, under sudden provocation, could equal that of one who, with foreknowledge, deliberately makes a mother of a woman so fearfully tainted by this deadly tendency? Why, every kiss from your innocent children would be like the caress of victims you had wilfully doomed to misery and destruction."

His manner had grown graver, sterner, as he spoke. In his listener's apparent vacillation he thought he detected the taint of unworthy motives, of a disinclination to forfeit the material advantages likely to accrue to him from the marriage. But Dr. Munro suddenly straightened himself up, with a deprecating gesture.

"Don't, Reid, don't! I know you are right. But it is such a horrible necessity to face. It seems such a cowardly thing to abandon a woman."

"What claim has she upon you," Arthur Reid answered more gently, "as against that of the children she might bear you, who might, in time, be women, cursing you from the depths of degradation and misery for ever having been responsible for their existence?"

"Yes, yes, I know it all. But *how* to do it?"

"Wait for a few hours before you attempt to

form any plan of action. I saw Mrs. Kissock again this afternoon. She thinks she remembers your visit, and must understand you know all. Some action on her part may be a guide as to your best course of procedure."

"How, in fact," he replied, with an accent of intense bitterness, "to slay your victim by degrees, with gentle courtesy. I am not sure the bludgeon of a brutal murderer is not more merciful under the circumstances."

"You were better to draw a parallel from your own profession. You are going to perform a critical operation, attended with grave danger to life. You would not, under such circumstances, deem coarse handling and brutal haste the best methods."

"Oh, I don't know," he said wearily. "The truth is, I am still too stunned and bewildered to grapple the subject fairly. It is strange, as you say, how personal feeling confuses judgment. Not the faintest suspicion on this subject ever crossed my thoughts. *Now*, I feel that had I been a mere spectator, one or two little things I have noticed would have startled me. My idleness to-day will involve a long round to-morrow. Like the good friend you are, Reid, contrive to let Mrs. Kissock know, so that my not calling may be satisfactorily accounted for, if necessary. In the evening I will hear from you what has transpired during the day."

"It will be your wisest course. I will make a point of calling at Glendyne in the course of the afternoon."

"Good-night, then, and God bless you, Reid. Things are bad enough as they are, but without your loyal friendship and aid I think it would have been more than I could have borne."

Little sleep visited the minister's pillow that night. The possibility that some action on the part of Agnes Davidson might prove a bright beam of light in a very dark place had served its turn as an excuse for declining, at the moment, to suggest any course of action. But he found little consolation during the silent hours of darkness from anticipation of the appearance of any such guiding-star. He could not but recall Dr. Munro's own parallel, and admit it was little to be hoped the victim would herself indicate the most fitting sacrificial method.

Breakfast over the following morning, he tried to settle down to an hour or two of steady reading. But the attempt proved singularly futile. An elaborate thesis on the responsibility of those who bore minute holes in the moral dams which hold back the waters of self-indulgence he could have written with acrid force and burning speed; but his mind was singularly stubborn in its resistance of all efforts to turn it in any other direction, and he welcomed the interruption of his housekeeper's appearance with a note requiring an answer. He took it from her, glanced at the address, and his heart began to beat faster than any note directed in a feminine hand had ever caused it to beat before. The writing was that of Agnes Davidson. "I will bring the answer myself in a few moments," he said, and the woman left the room.

Then he hastily tore open the note. It contained but a few lines. Miss Davidson particularly wished to see him. Could he make it convenient to call that day, and, if so, would he send her word at what hour to expect him? With a lightened heart he hastily wrote and despatched an answer, promising to be at Glendyne about three o'clock in the afternoon.

A less unselfish nature might have regarded the position with more mingled feelings, for the circumstances did not portend for him a primrose path to a garden of delights. But he had no attention to spare for personal considerations. All his thoughts were absorbed with the prospect of being, perchance, able to lighten to some extent the first onrush of the storm for the two on whom it must fall so heavily. What could Agnes Davidson intend? Did she know that he had been with Dr. Munro on the occasion of his momentous visit the previous day? Would she confess the truth, and implore him to use his influence with his friend to induce him to overlook the slip? Would she complicate the case by the duplicity so common under the circumstances, and protest that accident, due to disordered health, had alone been responsible for what had occurred? And what should he say to her? How best prepare her for the inevitable? By what arguments or entreaties seek to induce her to make a desperate fight against this terrible propensity? He speculated and pondered in ever-deepening anxiety, for striving as he was, in the phrase of a clever writer, "to do what he did not understand,

by means which he had never possessed," he naturally made little progress.

When he reached Glendyne in the afternoon, he was admitted by Margaret Kisson with a manner which seemed to him to imply she understood the reason of his visit.

"What does she want?" he asked in a whisper.

"'Deed, I canna tell ye. She's no' like hersel' to-day ava. I canna mak' her out."

She opened the drawing-room door, and in another moment Arthur Reid was in Agnes Davidson's presence.

She was very pale, with a pallor quite different from her ordinary colourlessness of complexion; but her bearing was self-possessed, and devoid of any trace of shame or confusion. Her greeting was cold, and there was just a shade of dignity about her demeanour which was quite unwonted. The minister was very speedily made aware that it was not for him to guide the course of circumstances.

"I hope," she said in a constrained voice, "you will not think it very impertinent of me to ask you to call. But you have always been so kind, I felt sure you would be ready to help me in a matter of some little difficulty."

"Assuredly. I shall only be too glad to be of service to you in any way," replied the minister, seeking hurriedly to arrange in serviceable order his rather scattered array of arguments and entreaties. The girl seemed to be coming up to her point with precision and firmness.

"Thank you. I am sure of that. What I want you to do for me is to be the bearer of a communi-

cation from me to Dr. Munro. For reasons into which it is needless to enter, I have decided that our engagement must be broken off. But, you know, in such cases people misrepresent things so, and Hec—Dr. Munro has always been so good and kind to me, I would be very sorry if any blame was imputed to him, when I am not here to defend his character. Now, if you will be so kind as to announce my determination to him, and give him this little note, you will then be in a position, if anything injurious to him is said, to bear witness to the fact of the action being entirely my own, and in no way due to any fault on Dr. Munro's part."

"Certainly. I shall be quite in a position to do that," replied the rather startled minister.

"You quite understand me? Dr. Munro is wholly blameless. I have not the smallest complaint to make against him. His conduct to me has been everything it should be, nor has he breathed a word implying any wish on his part to end our relations. The wish to do so is entirely on my side. That is quite clear to you?"

"Quite."

"Then, there is the note for Dr. Munro. He will receive a further communication soon—when I am away. Then he will understand better. I think it will be better for us not to meet again."

"You are going to leave Glendyne, then?"

"Yes. I shall not be here—any more. Oh, but the music! But you will not have been expecting me to play any more?"

"Do not let that disturb you in the least. I can easily arrange everything."

"Thank you. You have always been very kind to me, Mr. Reid. I shall likely not see you again. You will be sure and tell Dr. Munro why I asked you to come and take my message and note to him? I know it was rather a liberty to take. But I am so anxious no unjust blame should fall on him."

"I will certainly do my utmost, Miss Davidson, to carry out all your wishes. But I must admit you surprise me, and make me feel very anxious. Is your absence to be a long one?"

A wan ghost of a smile flitted over her face. "I think so," she said.

"But it is surely a sudden determination? Have you considered well? Are you well advised?"

"I have considered very well, and am quite sure my course is the best for everyone concerned. But you will understand my action better afterwards. When Dr. Munro gets the packet I spoke of, I have no doubt he will explain to you. Now, will you excuse me? I have a good many things to attend to. Good-bye, and thank you, once more, for being so kind."

Perplexed, bewildered, and anxious, Arthur Reid left the house. Yet in spite of the grave tone of his thoughts, he could hardly repress a smile at the remembrance of his previous speculations. How should he speak, advise, and urge? Small chance, indeed, had he of exercising any volition in that matter. Had he been summoned to receive the commands of a sovereign, he could

hardly have been afforded less chance of expressing any opinions or sentiments of his own. And this calm, almost imperious announcer of her own wishes and intentions was the usually dull, listless victim of a degrading habit, which had just made shipwreck of all her best chances in life. It was passing strange, but wholly inexplicable, without a hold on some clue which he did not possess.

Close by the bridge he found Margaret Kissock awaiting him, in much anxiety. "Eh, minister," she said, "what was she wantin' wi' ye? I'm fair wandered wi' her strange ways."

The minister told her what had passed. "Ay, then she kens fine, puir lassie. I thought she did. But never a word has she said to me. I'm right glad, for the doctor's sake, she's taken it that way. It'll spare him a heap."

"But what is all this about her going away?" the minister asked.

"That's mair than I can tell ye. I canna mak' her out ava. She's no' a bit like hersel' since she woke up frae her sleep yesterday."

"Can she go away? Has she any friends to go to? Has she any money?"

"She's nae frien's to gang till. She has some siller—a legacy left till her. Nae ower muckle. Maybe a hunner' pounds, or so. But I'm sure she hasna ta'en it out o' the bank. Whiles I doubt if she's no' gone a bit wrang in her mind. It's like as if kennin' the doctor saw her yesterday, an' kent what was wrang, had gien her a sort o' a shock; or maybe it's yon fit in the kirk. But, ony gait, she's clean altered frae her usual."

The minister stood thinking in silence for a moment. "It is a most anxious and difficult position," he said at last; "but it is for Dr. Munro to decide what must be done, in his professional capacity, if in no other. Perhaps her note to him may throw some light on the matter. I will see him as soon as I possibly can."

The interview did not, however, take place until a rather late hour, matters of business detaining the minister until near ten o'clock. With a mixture of dread and astonishment which left no room for any sensation of relief, Dr. Munro heard of the summons and strange commission his friend had received. He hastily tore open the note, glanced rapidly over the few lines traced therein, and then handed it to his companion. It ran thus—

"DEAR HECTOR,—I have determined to break off our engagement. I need not say any more just now. I shall be away directly, then you will get a packet, and you will understand better. Mr. Reid will tell you why I asked him to come and take this note for me.
A. D."

"She is off her head, clean off her head," Dr. Munro exclaimed, in much agitation. "There is not a doubt of it."

"She shows no symptom of it. She is singularly calm and collected, and that note does not look like it. A disordered mind does not generally achieve, in writing especially, such terse, vigorous sentences."

“Well, there is something very wrong, I am certain of it. I must speak to her father. A miserable resource, truly! But no one else can act with any authority. Oh, what a miserable state of things, that trying and critical circumstances of such a nature should be left to the management of a trio of men!”

CHAPTER XIV

CUTTING THE GORDIAN KNOT

AT the earliest hour permissible the following morning the minister and Dr. Munro started for Glendyne. Dr. Munro's anxiety had not decreased during the night.

"I can't tell you, Reid, how awfully nervous I feel," he said. "The note and all you say is so unlike her, I am certain there must be something seriously amiss. I wish I had made a point of seeing her on Monday instead of trusting to her note."

The calm, untroubled face of Margaret Kissock, as she admitted them to the house, was, however, reassuring, and Dr. Munro breathed more freely. Her tranquil aspect was quite sufficient evidence that, as yet, nothing of a startling nature had transpired. The laird, she said, was somewhere about the yard, and she would send the lassie to seek him.

"And Miss Davidson," the doctor asked, "what of her?"

"She's nae down the morn, an' I'm right glad ye're goin' to speak to the laird, for there's somethin' in the wind. She was particular quiet yesterday,

an' stayed maist o' the day up in her room. But while they were in at their tea I just slippit upstairs, an' she'd been turnin' ower a heap o' things in her room. I couldna see ony signs o' packin', but she'd been arrangin' things. I canna mak' out what's in her heid ava."

"But why is she not down this morning?"

"She tauld me last night she'd a sair heid, an' wad tak' some o' the medicine you gave her for't. Ye'll ken what that is."

"Yes, I know. I hope she has taken it. It would be the best thing possible."

"Weel, she said it wad likely mak' her sleep late, an' if she didna ring, I was to gang up to her room about ten o'clock an' wauken her. It's just on the chap o' ten now. But if ye're for a chat wi' the laird, I'se maybe best let her lie a little longer. I'll just look into her room, an' see she's no' stirrin'."

She left them in the drawing-room, and went upstairs. A brief silence followed—then a shrill scream rang through the house. "Minister! doctor! for the love of God come quickly!" they heard her shouting from above.

Both men sprang up the stairs. They found her on the landing, clinging to the balustrade, ghastly white, and shivering as if in an ague fit. "Oh, she's gane! she's gane!" she sobbed.

"Gone? How? Where? What do you mean? Run away?"

"Na, na. Worse—oh, worse! Look in there;" and she pointed to an open door close at hand.

The minister and Dr. Munro were in the room in a moment. It was gloomy, like everything else

about that ill-omened house, and strangely wanting in all those trivial little ornamentations with which girls delight to adorn their own special domains. But a subdued light penetrated through the undrawn window-blind. On the bed, fully dressed in her ordinary evening dress, lay, white and motionless, the hapless victim on whose frail head the accumulated load of misery, springing from the sinful self-indulgence of generations, had been piled. An empty phial, labelled "Laudanum," standing on a small table beside her, sufficiently indicated the kind of sword with which she had cut the Gordian knot of the cord that bound the cruel burden of life upon her. Rarely had that dull, joyless face worn a look of such perfect peace as rested upon it in the depths of its dreamless slumber.

Dr. Munro bent over her for a few moments' brief examination. Then rising, he said in a low, tremulous voice, "Quite dead—for some hours."

Arthur Reid glanced rapidly over the room. Then he turned to the old servant, who had entered, and was standing close to them. "Go downstairs at once," he said authoritatively, "and prevent her father from coming here. Dr. Munro and I will follow you directly, and break the news to him."

She turned to do his bidding. With her horror-stricken face and trembling limbs, she was but a frail shield to break the force of a staggering blow. But benevolent intentions were more on the minister's lips than in his mind at the moment. He wanted to get rid of her. The instant she

had left the room, he crossed to a table near the window, on which were lying books and writing materials, saying as he did so, "Come here, Munro."

Dr. Munro joined him, and instantly saw what had caught his companion's less preoccupied eye, a small packet lying on the blotting-tablet. It was addressed to himself.

"Conceal it at once," Arthur Reid said, "until you see what is in it. You may hide much by preventing it from coming to light."

Dr. Munro hastily placed the packet in an inner pocket; and at the moment the voice of the old laird was heard from below.

"I'll no' wait, I tell ye. I will gang up. What's a' this stramash? What was yon skirling about, an' what are they twae doing up there?"

They heard his ascending footfall, and the minister took a hasty step forward, as though with the intention of preventing him from entering the room. But the doctor caught his arm and stayed him.

"Let the flinty-hearted old scoundrel come, if he chooses," he muttered between his clenched teeth. And standing by the writing-table, they watched with, in truth, more of curiosity than of sympathy for his entrance.

Within the doorway the old man paused, glanced at the two young men, then at the bed. He did change colour, and start with a sort of quick wince. Then, approaching the bedside, he stood for a moment looking down in silence on all that remained of his only child.

"Ay, she's dune it at last," he said, with but little trace of emotion in his voice. "I aye thought it wad be that way some day. She's her mother's ain child. It's how she'd have ended, if she'd lived much longer."

Dr. Munro looked at him for a moment in mute abhorrence. Then, in a tone vibrating as much with anger as agitation, he said, "You dare to stand there and say such a thing? You recognised such a danger and took no steps to avert it?"

"What could I do? Could I keep her tied to me wi' a string a' her days?"

"You could, at least, have provided change and amusement for her. Wasn't it enough to unsettle any girl's reason to live from one year's end to another in such a dungeon as this?"

"I'd nae siller to spend on jauntin' about. Better folk than her hae lived content at Glendyne a' their days."

Dr. Munro was about to reply, but the words were arrested on his tongue by the sight of Margaret Kissock's face. She had followed her master, and was standing just within the door. Her scared, stricken look was gone, her rugged features were dark as a thunder-cloud, and her black eyes were glittering like the stars on a frosty night.

"An' is that a' ye hae to say, Glendyne?" she burst forth, "stan'in' there, wi' her that was yer ain flesh an' blude lyin' before ye, dead by her ain hand? My auld heart's wae for the puir lassie that was like my ain bairn to me, that was never

a mither. But a fine lot ye care, that's her ain faither. Na, na, minister," she broke off, as Arthur Reid strove to interpose; "I'll no' haud my peace. I hae tholed lang, but he shall hae it now. Eh, ye fause-hearted loon! what right had ye ever to bring her into the warld? Fine ye kent what ye were doin', for the gude auld minister was fair an' straucht wi' ye, an' richt weel ye kent how it wad be wi' ony bairn born o' Annie Brodie. But muckle ye cared sae lang as ye got the siller, an' I bless the Lord ye missed the maist o' that, after a'. An' what did ye ever do for yer puir unhappy wife? Do ye mind how she strove wi' the temptation, when she kent the bairn was comin', because she knew how it wad be if she didn't? An' do ye mind how she prayed ye, wi' tears, to tak' her awa' to the sea, because she'd a longin' for the sea, an' she thought she might struggle through there, an' ye wadna, because it wad cost a wheen pounds? An' ye ken how, when she found ye wadna do't for her, she just gave way, an' was worse than ever. An' what did ye ever do to try an' save her that's lyin' there frae the curse that was born wi' her? Did ever ye try to keep the cursed drink frae her? How often hae I prayed ye, wi' tears, to banish it frae the house, or if ye wad hae it for yersel', to keep it hidden awa?—an' fient a haet wad ye e'en tak' the trouble to lock it up. Man, I tell ye, ye're as much a murderer as if ye'd slain her wi' yer ain han'. Her blude's on yer han's. An' what'll the pickle o' siller do for ye, when ye hae to answer for't before the judgment bar o' God? I tryst ye

there, Glendyne,"—and her voice rose almost to a scream,—“to answer for the soul o’ her that should never hae been born, an’ that ye never tried to save, when ye’d gi’en her the life that was a curse till her. Ye stony-hearted sinner, yer time ’ll come! Is it no’ written that the prosperity o’ the wicked shall come to a fearfu’ end?”

It was a thrilling scene. The frantic woman; the hoary-headed object of her scathing invective, to all appearance unmoved, save for an evil expression on his face; the two younger men, painfully agitated; and on the bed the pale, still form, calmly sleeping that peaceful sleep whose repose no earthly storm may ruffle.

As the excited woman paused, the minister stepped resolutely forward. “Peace, woman!” he said sternly. “Have you no respect for even the presence of death? Go downstairs.”

She stared wildly at him for a moment, then burst into a fit of hysterical sobbing, and left the room.

“The woman’s clean aff her heid,” remarked the old laird coolly. “I wadna say but she’s been’ at the drink hersel’.”

Utter disgust aroused Dr. Munro from the agitation of personal feeling to the fitting mood for the professional action required of him. “It is needless, and must be painful, for you to remain here, Mr. Davidson,” he said. “If you will go downstairs, Mr. Reid and I can arrange everything that is needed for the moment.”

“I doubt ye’s best come down yersel’s. What

is there to do here, but for the women to lay her out?"

"There is this to do, sir," replied the doctor shortly, "to see that the body of your daughter is touched by no one until the proper formalities have been carried out. The fact of her being found dead, with an empty laudanum-bottle by her side, is of course strong presumptive evidence as to the cause of death. But it is not conclusive. There must be a searching examination, and it will be my duty to remain here until the proper authorities arrive."

"Oh, weel, just as ye please. There's naebody about the house 'll grudge ye that task."

He left the room as he spoke.

"Now, Reid, my good fellow," said the doctor, "off with you. I suppose you know pretty well what to do. Christie must send word instantly to the inspector. Stay. You might send a note yourself to Dr. Ross. He is the man the police always employ. Tell him to bring with him whatever assistance he requires. He knows. He will quite understand this is a case I cannot meddle with professionally. Then make Christie come up and mount guard here until they arrive, and release me. I've no mind for the work. Besides, I have patients I must see. Come back with him yourself."

"Must you actually remain here, Munro—in this room? Could I not mount guard for you till Christie comes?"

"No, I must stay myself; but not necessarily in the room. That is, if the key will act. Yes, it is

all right; and there is no other entrance. It will be quite sufficient if I lock the door, and keep the key in my own possession, without leaving the house."

The minister was soon on his rapid way; but far more rapidly had the startling news flown, and the village street was all alive with groups of excited talkers and eager listeners. The wildest rumours, growing in volume, and gaining distinctness of increasingly hideous outline with every moment, were flying from mouth to mouth. Could spiritual forms but be visible to mortal eyes, Arthur Reid had surely seen the air alive that day with lying spirits. On him every eye was riveted, but not the most feverish thirst for information emboldened anyone to seek it from his lips. His stern, rigid face and resolute bearing were quite sufficient protection, and he passed unmolested to where the village constable was just preparing to start for Glendyne in search of trustworthy information, wherewith to replace the floods of assertion. Messengers with full details were speedily despatched, and then the two men returned together to the gloomy house, which seemed so fitting a scene for such a tragedy. By that time they were thankful to press into service a couple of gamekeepers from a neighbouring estate, who, happening to be in the village, had stayed to hear further intelligence, in order to prevent the very trees adjoining the house from becoming the vantage-ground of a host of watchful sentinels.

Then, freed at last from his trying vigil, Dr. Munro was free to quit the scene of such an

infinitely painful release from an embarrassing position, and a cruel necessity. By the same rough road they had followed on the day the thunderbolt had fallen on him, they reached his house unmolested, and there Arthur Reid would have taken his leave.

"No, no," Dr. Munro said. "Come in with me. There is something yet for us to learn, you know."

The minister hesitated. "For you, Munro; but hardly, I think, for me."

"Yes, yes, for both. You have been too closely mixed up in this matter for me to regard you as other than a second self. And remember it was she herself who drew you, of her own free will, into close association with our affairs. It may be her last words are as much for you as for me."

Arthur Reid yielded, and they entered the house together. Dr. Munro took the parcel from his pocket, and broke the seals. The wrappings when unfolded disclosed to view the poor girl's engagement ring, two or three other trinkets, and some other trifles. With them was a letter. "All the things I had given her," Dr. Munro said in a low voice. He stood looking at them for a moment, holding the letter; then, seating himself at the table, he spread it out before him, and with his head resting on his hand, began its perusal. He was sitting with his back to the fire, by which the minister was seated. Without any unseemly scrutiny, his increasing agitation, as he read, was very apparent to Arthur Reid. He did not move when he had finished the letter, only pressed the hand on which his chin had rested firmly against

his eyes, and held out the paper with the other towards his friend. Again the minister hesitated.

"Surely it is a breach of confidence," he said.

"No, no," was the reply, in a half-choked voice.

"Read it, read it. My poor, poor Aggie!"

The minister took the letter, and began reading—

"DEAR HECTOR,—By the time you get this letter you will know and understand everything, and I hope you will forgive me all the trouble and sorrow I have caused you. Oh, you can never, never know how very miserable my life has been! When we were first engaged I was so happy,—the only happiness I ever knew,—and I thought then I could keep everything right, for your sake; but it was no use. I remembered about your being here on Wednesday, and then I knew all hope was over, and I would never be your wife. I made up my mind then I wouldn't live any longer, to be a misery to myself and a trouble to others; and I thought and thought all that night, until I had planned it all, about sending for Mr. Reid, and everything, so that no one might blame you. I knew if I did this without breaking off our engagement first, people would be sure to say you had done something to drive me to it. I have tried to think of everything as it will be best for you, dear Hector, so you must try to forgive me for the past. It will be much better for you I should be dead and gone. People say it is very wicked to kill oneself, but they always praise up anyone who risks certain death to save someone else's life, so surely it cannot be so very wicked to kill oneself in order to save someone else from a great deal of sorrow and trouble. But I cannot help it if it is. I hope God will forgive me, for your sake. He is very merciful, and can't want me to live on with

this dreadful curse upon me. Good - bye, dear Hector, and may God bless you for your kindness to me; and always remember you gave me the only little bit of happiness I ever knew. I hope you will marry some very good woman, who will make you very happy; and when everything is bright and prosperous with you, think kindly sometimes of your poor unhappy AGGIE."

The lines were quivering more than once in the tremulous glitter of unshed tears as the minister read, and when he laid the letter again on the table no word was spoken on either side. Neither could speak, in truth, for the choking sensation in the throat of each. But the strong magnetic current of keen sympathy was none the less actively at work, and it fairly overmastered Dr. Munro. Laying his outstretched arms on the table, he bowed his forehead down upon them, and sobbed heavily.

The minister neither moved nor spoke until the storm had spent itself. When at length Dr. Munro had battled down his emotion, he rose and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Brace yourself up, Munro," he said, "and face the truth manfully. It is better so."

"I could heartily say 'Amen' to that if it had come differently. Poor darling! life had little but wretchedness in store for her! If only she had not died by her own hand! Reid,"—and he started up, and began pacing up and down the room in much agitation,—“we men are cursed selfish brutes. What sort of wise and pious resolutions were those you and I concocted between us?

"And is suicide, after all, such a very terrible thing?" Arthur Reid quietly asked, putting the startling question with deliberate purpose. The man was beating the air wildly in the struggle of sorrow and self-reproach, exhausting himself, and gaining no definite end. The concentration of his thoughts on some more general, and thus less absolutely personal aspect of the subject in his mind, would afford the best chance of reinvigorating his mental powers.

"How?" he exclaimed, stopping abruptly.

"Do you think suicide is always such a very deadly crime?"

"I certainly think the implied doubt is a very curious one to come from a minister."

"Not if you set aside mere conventional theories. Our ideas on the subject are terribly encrusted with cruelty and superstition, relics of the stake and cross roads of the Middle Ages. There is much to be said for her suggestion of the weight of motives. If you come to think of it, all our opinions about suicide are a jumble of contradictory absurdities. Every human being who sacrifices his life when he could save it is, in a sense, a suicide. If some man, whose death means hardship, struggle, and privation for a wife and family, sacrifices his life to save that of a drunken reprobate, who is a curse and burden to everyone connected with him, we laud him to the skies as a hero. But let the deliberate sacrifice of a life be in order to lift some terrible burden or difficulty off other lives, and straight we cry out about the dreadful sin, and begin to think of cross roads and stakes."

He had to some extent gained his purpose. Dr. Munro's agitation decreased, as his interest was caught by the boldness of the theory. "That is what she did for me," he said.

"Yes, in part, though doubtless intense mental depression had much to do with her resolution. But never doubt that in so far as the motive was pure and unselfish, she will reap her reward. And do not unduly reproach yourself. There is something of the old story in it. Beautiful and noble impulses, giving rise to doubtful, if not disastrous action, because they are allowed to usurp the province of reason, and not only be the source, but the guide and controller of action."

He rose to leave as he spoke. "Thanks, Reid, thanks," Dr. Munro said. "You have helped me wonderfully to pull through a very trying hour. I believe you are right in what you said before. Morbid sensitiveness about mere physical life is our danger in these days."

"Yes, undoubtedly. If we can only get a right view of that point, a lot of other difficulties fall easily into line. Only there is such an awful lot of rubbish to be cleared away before we can get any view of the subject at all."

CHAPTER XV

AN APPROPRIATE DISCOURSE

VERY effective, as an impenetrable veil of mystery, had been the seclusion of Glendyne, and the silent vigilance of Margaret Kisson. Glendarff eyes had never caught a glimpse, nor its ears a creak of the skeleton within those walls. The forty years which had elapsed since the death of Mrs. Brodie constituted too wide a gulf for the old manse traditions to cross and weave themselves in with the threads of present life at Glendyne; and though there had been rumours of Mrs. Davidson occasionally taking a drop more than she should, that was far too venial a transgression, in Glendarff opinion of that date, to leave a memory outlasting her life by seventeen years. Had Mrs. Macneil but known the truth, there is no knowing to what heights of sublime denunciation she might have soared, for she was one of the most rigid of Glendarff total abstainers. Little did she dream of the glorious opportunities thus lost to her, as she stood discussing the tragedy in the post-office with a knot of acquaintances.

"Ye may tak' my word for it, the doctor's some way to blame," she asserted. "Ye may see for

yersel's the hang-dog sort o' look he's worn ever since."

"Ye're a'thegither wrang, then," retorted Mrs. Dempster. "The minister tauld Dempster, himsel', there wasna a word o' truth in the story the doctor was ony way to blame. He said the puir lassie tauld him hersel', afore ever it happened, she'd broken aff wi' the doctor, an' that it wasna for ony faut o' his. If he has a hang-dog look, whilk I'm no' denyin', ye may tak' yer aith he's frettin' ower it. Na, na, catch him throwin' her ower! I dinna suppose onybody thinks there was much luve in the business; but there was a hantle siller in it, for a body like him."

Mrs. Dempster had not a high opinion of Dr. Munro. Not only had he shown a sad lack of scientific insight in the treatment of a mysterious complaint from which she had suffered, but he had manifested a flippant inattention to her efforts to instruct him better.

"That's as may be," put in another neighbour. "Nae doubt she was a fine match for him, still I wadna say but, after a', he's in a sort o' a way in't. There's a heap o' folk speakin' o' yon Miss Mackenzie that was stayin' at the manager's, when there was that row about the choir. They say she was geyly set on the doctor, an' that Miss Davidson didna like it, an' that it gied her a sort o' a turn against him. There's a notion she got to set her fancy on Alan Mackenzie, an' broke aff wi' the doctor, thinkin' to get him, an' then found he was to marry his cousin that was here, an' that's what upset her."

"Weel, there may be somethin' in that," admitted Mrs. Dempster. "The doctor did carry on a bit wi' Miss Mackenzie, ye ken, an' he'll likely feel it now. I mind my mither sayin', too, there was word heard lang syne of Miss Brodie, she that married the laird, havin' a queer temper, so it's likely her daughter may just hae got it frae her."

"Hoot, woman," put in Mrs. Macneil, with much scorn, "yon lassie had nae temper. She was just a puir peekit thing, wi' nae mair spirit in her than a mouse. Na, na, ye may say what ye like, I've my ain opinion. The minister an' the doctor are ower thick for the minister's word to be o' much account."

"Maybe she thought to catch the minister himself. He looks awfu' grave. I doubt there's mair behind than onybody kens, if a' the truth cam' out."

"The minister may weel look grave. In a' my days I've nae mind o' ony serious crime in Glendarff; an' now, here's murder an' suicide before ever he's been in the place a year."

That view of the subject was in Arthur Reid's own mind, though not with any sting of self-reproach, rather with a dread of meeting old Mr. Duff, whose coarse jests sorely tried his temper. The results of those searching examinations, analytical and synthetical, whereby Glendarff reached a variety of opinions, all devoid of logical basis, and mostly self-contradictory, did not reach his ears. The local oracles held him in awe. But when he chanced, a week or two later, to adventure

himself in Netherport, the storm burst upon him, and he was buffeted with violent pronouncements from all points of the moral compass. The dogma of seven deadly sins is, of course, abhorrent to the Protestant mind, which holds firmly to the orthodox doctrine that all sins are of equal enormity,—save those that are specially heinous, or trifling,—and that suicide is the crown and climax of all transgressions. The occasion was improved for the benefit of a young and presumably inexperienced minister with zeal and energy. Arthur Reid, perplexed himself by the remembrance of Margaret Kisson's pathetic story, of her vehement onslaught on the laird, and of that piteous last letter, fled before the storm, and took refuge at the manse, on pretence of some trifling business with Dr. Crosbie. Opinions might not be quite to his liking there, but at least the tone of the house was kindly. Dr. Crosbie was busy at the moment with the session clerk, but would shortly be disengaged, and the servant led him to the drawing-room. Ellen Crosbie was there alone, and she came forward to meet him with flushed cheeks and tearful eyes.

"Oh, Mr. Reid," she said simply, "I am so very, very sorry."

He was almost startled at the amount of emotion she showed. "Did you know Miss Davidson?" he asked.

"Only slightly. We were so far apart, and she always seemed so shy, it was very difficult to get on with her. But I always felt very sorry for her. She must have led such a miserably dull life in

that wretched house. When I have taken friends up to see the Witches' Pass, it has often made me shudder to look at it. Such a dreary, gloomy place! I always thought Mr. Davidson a horrid old man. I do not believe he was a bit kind to poor Agnes."

"If there was any unkindness it was negative. I am sure he was not actually harsh to her."

"Oh no, I daresay not. But I am sure he never tried to brighten her life for her. And she must have been very unhappy, poor girl, before she could think of such a dreadful thing. I think Dr. Munro is horrid. Why did he not marry her at once, and get her away from that horrible old dungeon?"

"He could hardly do that, Miss Crosbie, without her father's co-operation. Dr. Munro is not yet in a position to marry, unless his wife had some income of her own."

"Would she not have been better off living with him in lodgings, without even a servant, if he was good to her, and tried to make her happy? Of course, it would have been different if she had had a comfortable, happy home. I think it was just selfishness in him," she added, with the happy confidence of youthful judgments.

"No, I think you must not blame Dr. Munro. You probably do not know that she had broken off her engagement to him before this sad tragedy happened."

"No, had she?" said the girl, opening her eyes wide in her astonishment.

"Yes, indeed. I was her messenger. And I

am very glad to have this chance of carrying out her expressed wish by telling you that she had no cause of complaint against Dr. Munro. She was very unhappy, and—though, of course, I had not the faintest suspicion of it—had this terrible purpose in her mind. She feared blame might be imputed to Dr. Munro, and asked me to be her messenger, in order that I might be able to bear witness to the fact that the engagement had been broken off by her, voluntarily, and that she had no complaint of any sort against him. He had done nothing to occasion her any distress. Apart from the act itself, she has behaved very nobly and unselfishly.”

The girl’s tears were falling as he spoke. “Poor, poor Agnes!” she said. “I do feel so sorry now I did not try harder to make friends with her. Oh, Mr. Reid, it is dreadful to think that perhaps it might have saved her if she had had friends to brighten her life a little for her.”

“No, you must not blame yourself. I know quite enough to feel sure she would not have responded to any efforts on your part, and that you could have done little or nothing for her. Her case was very peculiar.”

All the same, the minister thought his companion more charming than she had ever appeared before. After his experiences of the morning, this fearless sending forth of sympathy, divorced from all sound and orthodox judgments, was especially attractive. Ellen Crosbie was about to speak, when she suddenly bent forward and looked out of the window.

attractive, from attractive to charming. Now she had become adorable — adorable in her kindly sympathy — perhaps not less adorable in her vehement onslaught on his own particular enemy. At the moment he only smiled at her request; but, so far as he was concerned, the die was cast.

He contrived to avoid a meeting with his leading heritor for some little time. But then fickle fortune landed him in a disaster such as has been known occasionally to befall an unlucky cleric, innocent of all malevolent intention. The tragedy of Gledyne could hardly fail to bulk largely in the meditations of anyone to whom its secret causes had been so exhaustively laid bare. And when a minister, bound to preach two sermons every Sunday to the same congregation, has a subject of intense interest thus forced upon his attention, it may pretty safely be foretold that ere long his pulpit utterances will be vividly coloured thereby. As he lived again in thought through that eventful week following Agnes Davidson's strange seizure in church, many incidents of his city life rose up from peaceful slumber in the remoter chambers of Arthur Reid's memory, and came forth to weave themselves in with the threads of his present experiences, and the ultimate result was a sermon on the text, "Am I my brother's keeper?" which was unquestionably very far from being what the critical members of his congregation were wont to term "a wersh sort o' a discourse." And on the very Sunday for which he prepared that sermon, Mr. Duff found the bright frosty occasion when he

man would believe he had availed himself, in the meanest and most cowardly way possible, of a chance of venting personal spite. Dr. Munro had not been at church in the morning, but he joined him after the evening service.

"Well, Reid," he said, laughing, "I hear you have done it handsomely to-day."

"Oh, hang it all!" exclaimed the minister savagely, as the remark drove home his dread of the imputation likely to be cast upon him. "What brought the old ruffian here on this particular day?"

"Clearly the hand of Providence, my dear fellow; to which you ought to be devoutly thankful for a glorious opportunity."

"Of coming under strong suspicion of being a most rascally sneak? It's a sort of canon of social law that a layman may never inflict personal chastisement on a clergyman. There ought to be a special exception for the case of a man who aims pulpit utterances at individuals who are or may be present. If old Duff called upon me at this moment, armed with a horsewhip, I should hold him fully justified."

"Do you mean to do anything?"

"Of course I do. There is only one thing an honest, straightforward man can do. I shall call on him to-morrow, and explain. I daresay he won't believe me. But I am bound to do it, and express my regret."

Dr. Munro was silent for a moment. Then he said, "Have you ever been at Craigmore, Reid?"

"Not into the house. I have called twice on

matters of business, but did not find Mr. Duff at home."

"Oh, well, business visits are all right. But don't you stay to luncheon or dinner, old fellow."

"I am not in the least likely to do so. But why?"

"Because you are a minister; and because there is a housekeeper—a lady housekeeper, you know—who sits at the head of the table."

"Oh, I did not know that."

"And I shouldn't have told you, had the circumstances been different. She is a very quiet, rather pleasing person. I should never have suspected anything, had I not been a great deal there last winter, when he had a severe attack of bronchitis. Then I could not help noticing various trifles. It will be better for you to start with clear knowledge of the situation, than to have, after a time, to draw back."

"Thank you heartily for the caution, though I believe I should have been safe. It is the last house I am likely to visit, save under compulsion."

The following day Arthur Reid set out upon his distasteful errand. Mr. Duff received him amiably enough, though with, he thought, a rather malicious smile.

"Why didn't you come half an hour earlier?" he asked. "You'd have been in time for luncheon."

"Thank you. My visit is a purely business one. I cannot tell you, Mr. Duff, how much annoyed I am at what happened yesterday."

"Ah, you double-thonged me pretty handsomely,

didn't you? Lord! my dear fellow, you don't suppose I care, do you? I'm over seventy years of age, and used to going to church pretty regular. Do you think I haven't been lashed all over, till there ain't a tender place left? You'll have to use vitriolic acid at least, if you want to make me smart."

"I can quite imagine that. But I happen to be thinking of my own action, not of your feelings. I certainly preached a sermon which everyone present was likely to think was aimed at you, and the very rare incident of your presence would of course strengthen that suspicion. That is what I so much regret, and that regret I am bound to express to you, and, whether you believe me or not, to assure you I had not the least idea you were in the church until I saw you leaving it."

"You are come, in fact, to take it all back, and make peace with the rich heritor. Eh?" said the old man, with a grin.

"Not one sentence—not one single word!" exclaimed the minister vehemently. "I may have dwelt upon the topic more at length, but what, in actual fact, did I say, that I have not said personally to you? And here, between ourselves, I tell you plainly, every word fitted you as I believe it fitted no other person present. But whether a prince or a pauper be in question, it is a gross and flagrant offence for a minister ever to say one word in the pulpit which may seem to his hearers to point at any particular person. It is a different thing when a man fits the cap on his own head, and then complains. But when everyone goes

away saying that was meant for A, or B, the offence is rank."

"Well, well, you needn't bother your head about it. I believe you are speaking the truth, and I'm rather disappointed. I rather enjoyed the notion I'd lashed you up into such a jolly rage you couldn't resist going for me like a wild cat the moment you saw me in the church. Now I want to know about that business at Glendyne."

"That is a very sad and painful occurrence. You must excuse my discussing it."

"Oh, you needn't be so desperately close. Do you suppose I haven't a very good notion that young woman liked a glass of spirits over well?"

"I neither know nor care anything about your notions. But I should have thought you would have shown common decency enough to avoid airing injurious suggestions about an inoffensive girl in her grave."

"Oh, it's only to you. I am not saying anything to anyone else. But I know. I suppose she was muddled, and took the stuff by mistake."

"You are quite wrong there. Unhappily, her action was quite deliberate, and this much I may say, the result of intense depression of spirits, arising from a great shock, and very severe disappointment. Now, you must excuse my leaving you."

"No, stop a minute. You're always in such a hurry. You can't have such a confounded lot to do. There's a man I want to ask you about. Bless me! what's this his name is? I know I wrote it down somewhere,"—and he turned over some

papers lying on the writing-table. "Ah, here it is. Millroy—John Millroy. Do you know him?"

"Certainly I do," replied the somewhat startled minister, with many thoughts dashing through his brain. "He is one of the colliers working in the Glendarff pits."

"What like is the fellow?"

"In appearance?"

"No, no; I've seen him. What sort of character does he bear?"

"He is a queer, unsociable sort of man. But he is very quiet, and a regular worker."

"Humph! What do you suppose he came to me about?"

"I have not the faintest idea what he could want."

"He's got a notion in his head that I've something to do with that pub over there. What's this they call it?"—and he referred again to the paper,—*"The Miner's Rest"*. He said he'd heard Duncan was going to retire, and he wanted to know if I'd let him have it."

"Millroy want to take *The Miner's Rest*?" exclaimed Arthur Reid.

"That's what he says. Now, what I want to know is: first, what put it into his head I'd anything to do with it; second, what on earth he wants with it."

"I don't think it is hard to answer your first question. There is a very general impression about that you own a great many public-houses. That has probably given rise to his notion. But your second question I am wholly at a loss to answer.

The man has a most vehement hatred of drink, in any form."

"Oh, he is one of that sort, is he? Then I can pretty well find the answer for myself. There's a lot of blooming fools think they can take a lease of a licensed house and then shut it up. That'll likely be the notion he's got in his cracked brain. I think he's got hold of the name of the agent that has the letting of the house. If Duncan is really giving up, and he can get hold of it, he'll get his medicine, and serve him right. Now, I have only one more question to ask you, and then you may go, if you like. When are you going to make it up with my little girl down at the manse yonder?"

Great are the blessings of habitual self-control. The importance of assuming an attitude of perfect indifference flashed instantly across Arthur Reid's mind, and the malicious old man could only detect a frown of evident annoyance. "As I have not the faintest right to suppose Miss Crosbie has the slightest regard for me, Mr. Duff, I must beg, for her sake, you will not couple her name with mine. Further, I may tell you very plainly, when I do intend to make it up, as you phrase it, with any girl, you are about the last person whom I shall inform of my intention."

"Well parried, upon my word! But that won't do. I mean you to have my little girl, you know, and I must be prepared with a grand wedding present. They ain't so mighty straitlaced down there as you are. Of course, they rage at 'the drink,' but they're quite reasonable about the money. All the better for you, you see. You'll get all the credit

of your high-flying notions, and come in for a jolly handsome wedding present all the same. I shall spend on hers just what I should have spent on both, if you hadn't been so high and mighty. Now, ain't that a fine Christian spirit in a man you've been leathering as you leathered me last Sunday?"

It was too much! Without a single word, Arthur Reid got up and walked out of the room. Old Mr. Duff lay back in his chair and chuckled heartily.

CHAPTER XVI

A PUZZLE

INCALCULABLE is the waywardness of men. Arthur Reid had left home that day with no other intention than to return at once to Glendarff after his apologetic visit to Mr. Duff. But when, in a state of furious indignation, he came forth from the house, he did not take the direction of the small wicket-gate which opened upon the foot-path over the hill. He strode rapidly down the wide shrub-bordered gravel approach, leading to the principal entrance, on the highroad to Netherport. If there was no tender spot on the hardened old sinner's conscience which the lash might reach, he very well knew how to sting the young minister sharply, and the ferment of his irritation impelled him to precipitate action.

He had for some time cherished the purpose of, sooner or later, if Eros proved propitious, transplanting the bright, sunny presence of Ellen Crosbie to the manse of Glendarff; but so far he had been content with the possession of a definite resolution. His mother's demands upon his income were more likely to increase than decrease with every year of her suffering life, and in this state of absolute

uncertainty as to when he might be in such a position that he could ask an undowered girl to be his wife, he had deemed it best, so long as no rival appeared upon the field, to hold his peace. But the turmoil of his soul produced a sudden shifting of all his opinions and purposes. In the rather lurid illumination cast upon the sins and shortcomings of the old distiller, by his own personal resentment, they grew so doubly heinous that the immediate placing of himself in a position to interfere between him and Ellen Crosbie assumed almost the aspect of a duty. His "little girl," indeed! And the house one which a layman of by no means puritanical austerity had deemed himself bound to caution a clergyman to visit guardedly! Why, the girl herself went there occasionally, never alone, he believed, still she did go.

By the time he reached Netherport manse his temper had cooled down a little, but not to the extent of allowing his judgment to interfere with a suggestion respecting the weapon he was forging for his adversary's use, did Mr. Duff become aware the result of his Parthian shot had been an immediate conclusion of the engagement. The young lover had, in truth, been gradually nearing the plunge, even while he told himself it was yet in the distance, or he would have hardly been driven to take it by so slight an impulse. Fortune was pleased to smooth his way for him, for on his arrival at the manse he found Ellen pouring out tea for her father and mother, with a fly waiting at the door to convey them to a neighbour-

ing village, where Dr. Crosbie was to conduct a week evening service.

"You must excuse us," Mrs. Crosbie said, with much secret satisfaction, rising from the table almost as Mr. Reid entered. "The Doctor has to preach for Mr. Carment this evening. Ellen will give you some tea."

Ellen did give him tea, and she gave him a good deal besides. When at last the necessity of getting through the Witches' Pass before darkness fell compelled him to leave the manse, he seemed to himself almost uplifted from the ground he trod by the tumultuous delight of his certainty that Ellen Crosbie was ready to come to the manse of Glendarff so soon as he was in a position to claim her promise. Then, as he cast a glance of rather vindictive triumph at Craigmore, there fell upon him, like a breath of ice-cold wind, a perception of how entirely he had constituted himself an illustration of the tendency of human beings to miss the side-lights upon a subject when temper momentarily throws dust in the eyes of the judgment. He bit his lip with annoyance, but could only console himself with reflecting on the slender triumph for his tormentor involved in so distant a marriage.

He was trysted to appear the next day at Netherport manse, and go through the trying ordeal of reception into the bosom of the family. The first half-hour of his visit, a business interview with Dr. Crosbie, was rendered tolerably smooth by the fact of a remarkable paucity of any business to arrange. Dr. Crosbie spoke very frankly.

"You must quite understand, Mr. Reid," he said, "that I can give my daughter no fortune, beyond a small insurance on my own life, which is secured to her."

"To which," replied the younger man, "I can, unfortunately, only add the small amount I shall inherit from my mother. I must tell you very frankly, Dr. Crosbie, your daughter is not making what the world calls a brilliant marriage. Neither am I in a position to marry at the present moment. But as Ellen is so young, I hope you and Mrs. Crosbie will not object to our waiting a while."

"I have not the slightest ambition to see my daughter make a brilliant marriage. She could not have made a choice I should more heartily approve. And as to waiting, you may be very sure her mother and I will rather selfishly rejoice in that necessity, as it will enable us to keep her a few years longer with us. Come now and see Mrs. Crosbie, and you will soon find out how heartily she approves."

Mrs. Crosbie received her intended son-in-law with much effusion. "My dear Mr. Reid, dear Arthur, my utmost wishes for my child are more than fulfilled. I know how safe her happiness will be in your hands. And as to waiting! Why, she is not of age yet. Do you think a mother is anxious to be parted from her only daughter? The thought that I shall yet keep her with me for a few years seems to remove the only drawback I can see to your engagement. Also, as regards no present announcement of the intended marriage, I am quite at one with you. I entirely disapprove of

marriages which are not to take place at once being made public in any way. Long engagements always give rise to a great deal of gossiping and chattering, which in my experience has not unfrequently led to serious misunderstandings. By all means, let nothing be said about it at present."

"In three things," saith the Arabian poet, "place no confidence in a woman. She never brings to her tongue what is in her heart; she never speaks out what is on her tongue; and she never tells what she is doing." Arthur Reid, with thoughts uneasily turned in the direction of Craigmore, was charmed with the admirable good sense and judgment displayed by Mrs. Crosbie, and would, at that moment, have eagerly taken up the gauntlet in defence of mothers-in-law. But he was not quite so entirely in her confidence as he fondly imagined. She certainly did regard with satisfaction the prospect of keeping her daughter at home for a time, still that was not the main reason of her ready acquiescence in a long engagement. Mr. Reid, with this obstructive mother in the background, was not so brilliant a matrimonial star but that one more brilliant might possibly appear above the horizon; therefore it was well there should be no hurry. Also, for this same reason, it was well the engagement should be kept a secret, lest it should exercise a malign influence on matrimonial astrology. This secrecy, however, need not be too rigid, and she certainly did not mean it should extend to an old and valued friend like Mr. Duff. If he approved sufficiently to be aroused to one of his occasional fits of liberality, the engagement

might, after all, not be so very long a one. Short of any immediate action, a definite declaration on his part of any intentions on Ellen's behalf might materially affect the position of affairs. Thus, while the young minister's sky seemed to be flooded with cloudless sunshine, already there were thunder-clouds gathering below the horizon far darker than he could possibly suspect.

Naturally, this somewhat precipitate plunge into the realms of purely emotional bliss had a tendency to play havoc with the business-like methods of Arthur Reid's ordinary procedure. His distinctly ministerial duties were far too sacred in his eyes to admit of their suffering in any way, but he developed a marvellous capacity for forgetting all about absolutely mundane affairs, and among those which vanished wholly from his memory was the curious episode of Millroy's visit to Mr. Duff. But a habit had grown up of the doctor and himself spending most of their disengaged evenings with the two Mackenzies, both of whom, since the tragedy at Glendyne, had shown much tact and kindly feeling in endeavouring to draw Dr. Munro away from any opportunities of solitary musings. It chanced, one evening, when the quartette were chatting together as usual, that Millroy's name was mentioned, and the accident woke up the natural train of reminiscences in the minister's mind. He forthwith related what had passed at Craigmore, putting to his listeners the question which had then so puzzled himself. What could possibly be the object the man had in view?

"Begging," responded Alan Mackenzie, with the prompt confidence of youthful assurance.

"He set about it in an uncommonly queer way, then," said Arthur Reid. "A man doesn't generally begin begging by asking to become tenant of a highly-rented sort of house."

"A blind. He would have come round to it in some way. Only five minutes in old Duff's company would, I should think, quite convince any man he might as well make an appeal to the feelings of a stone dyke as to his."

"That's nonsense, Alan," put in his father. "There isn't a symptom of begging about the business. Besides, Millroy isn't that sort of fellow. Old Mrs. Aitken says he pays up everything to her like clock-work, and is quite in a fidget if she hasn't his bill ready for him every Saturday. That isn't the kind of man that goes about begging. What is your opinion, Munro?"

The doctor shook his head. "I haven't got any opinion," he said. "Millroy is not the kind of basis on which I care to build up opinions."

"I am rather inclined to accept Mr. Duff's theory," said the manager. "Only, in that case, I suspect Millroy is only agent, not principal. I don't think he can possibly have money enough to carry out such a scheme himself. But being a bit of a fanatic on the drink question, he is not unlikely to have been got hold of by some hot-headed total abstainers, who know nothing of the usual terms of leases of licensed houses, and fancy they could get The Miner's Rest into their hands and then close it. An evil day it would be for the

wives and children of the heavy drinkers in the place if they could, for then the men who now drink up there would buy spirits and drink at home, and their lives would be just so much more bitter to them than they are. But I don't believe Duncan has any thought of leaving."

"Not he," said the younger Mackenzie. "You may depend upon it the whole thing is a plant."

"But with what object?"

"With the object of setting us talking a heap of nonsense," broke in Dr. Munro rather snappishly. "There is no forecasting what a fellow like Millroy may do. If he happens some day to blow your brains out for you, Mackenzie, I hope you'll have time to remember I warned you to get rid of him."

"And I, my dear fellow," replied the manager, laughing, "most sincerely trust I may have a few extra minutes given me in which to reflect that you never gave me any reason which I could possibly assign as a justification for dismissing the quietest, steadiest, and most regular man we have about the pits."

"What made you so short over that question of Millroy?" the minister asked, when he and Dr. Munro found themselves alone on their homeward way.

"Do you need to ask, recalling all the circumstances of Kelly's murder?"

"You think the two things are connected?"

"I feel little doubt about it. Of course, I never for a moment believed Duff had any hand in Kelly's death. Still, the fact of a discreditable connection between the two men was quite suffi-

ently proved by what Welsh unearthed. The men who murdered Kelly ransacked the cottage. Who can tell what they may have found? Of course, Murphy cannot show his face; but what about the other fellow? It struck me the moment you mentioned Millroy's visit to old Duff that probably they did find a good sum of money, and that now they want to get hold of The Miner's Rest as a convenient basis for further operations on Duff. Murphy would be a sleeping partner. If there is any truth in the idea Duff is really the owner of the place, men holding a lease of the house, and possessing information it would not suit him should become public property, would have splendid chances. Duff would have no option but to dance to their piping."

"But Duncan is not likely to leave the place, seemingly."

"Mackenzie is not quite so well posted up as he imagines. Welsh asked me the other day what sort of character Duncan bore, and whether The Miner's Rest had a good name. It had come to Welsh's knowledge that Duncan had been looking at some place in Netherport which is likely to change hands. If the men who murdered Kelly have really got hold of sufficient information to give them a firm grip on Duff, the plot is an uncommonly good one, and must have been devised by a man with a long head."

"I'll sound Millroy on the first opportunity," Arthur Reid said, not a little struck himself with the plausibility of the hypothesis. "If I do so on the pretence of warning him of the futility of any

notion he could close the house in that way, I may chance to draw something out of him."

An opportunity of carrying out this design was not difficult to find. John Millroy lodged in a house situated at the extreme end of the village farthest from the pits. He had therefore to pass along the whole length of the straggling street in going to and returning from his work. It was therefore easy enough for the minister to meet him as if accidentally.

"Well, Millroy," he said, "so I hear you are coming out in a new character."

"Me, sir? How?" The man's face was absolutely impenetrable.

"I hear you are anxious to become landlord of The Miner's Rest."

A gloomy sort of smile flitted over the man's face. "I'm a likely yin to haud a place like yon, ain't I?"

"What did you mean, then, by going and asking Mr. Duff about it?"

"Wha tellt ye I did?"

"Mr. Duff himself; so there's no good in your trying to deny it."

"I'm no' denyin' it. I did ask him about it. But it's no' certain Duncan means to gang."

"I know that. But what in the world are you up to, Millroy? You've been asking Mr. Duff to let you have the house, and now you laugh at the idea of your holding such a place. Have you got the notion in your head you can take it and then close the house? If so, I warn you you are running your head against a post. Leases of

licensed houses always bind the tenant to keep them open as such."

"I ken that fine, sir. But ye'd nae need to gang sae far as Craigmore if ye wanted to ken what's up. There's ither folk ken I'd a notion o' tryin' for the place, if Duncan mak's up his mind to gang, an' that's only a question o' the cost o' anither place he's thinkin' o'. Mr. Duff wadna own up to the house bein' his ava, but I ken fine about that. It's just my notion, if ye canna stap the sale o' drink, the next best thing's to haud a check on't. There's a cousin o' mine that's been a' his days in that sort o' business, an' him an' me came in for a wheen pounds, through the death o' an uncle. He hasna just sae much as wad set him up here, but if I put my share intilt, he wad manage fine, an' then, ye ken, I'd hae my say about things, an' keep a tight han' on what went on."

The minister laughed. "And in six months there'd be about as pretty a quarrel over it as could possibly be, and lawyers would be about the only gainers by the business. One man putting his money into a licensed house in order to sell drink, and another putting in his in order to hinder the sale of drink! Did you ever see two men sitting face to face and trying to row a boat, Millroy? That's just about what you're going to attempt."

The man's sullen face lowered. "Folk say ye're desperately set against drink yersel', sir, for a' ye're no' a teetotaler. I'd no' hae thought ye'd try set one against doin' what one can."

"You'll not hinder the selling of a thimbleful of

spirits by your plan, and you'll only lose any little capital you possess. That is what I should like to hinder."

"I'm greatly obliged to ye, sir; but ye'll no' hinder me frae doin' what I've a mind to do, my ain way; sae gude day to ye."

He walked on with a scowling brow, leaving Arthur Reid pretty well convinced of the correctness of Dr. Munro's hypothesis. The story was, as an actual fact, so wildly improbable, as an explanation of the circumstances so plausible, that he could hardly doubt it had been invented for that very purpose. One further opinion of Dr. Munro's was clearly justified. Millroy was by no means the apathetic, dull-witted fellow he appeared to be. He was either acting a part for some purpose of his own, or his ordinary demeanour was due to such absolute mental absorption with some one special topic that he took little heed of what was passing around him.

The minister very shortly ascertained that on one point, at least, the man had spoken truly. He had been on his way to, and not far from the post-office when he and Millroy met, and their conversation had not escaped the vigilance of Mrs. Macneil, who, according to her common practice, was standing knitting at her door, and supervising the proceedings of Glendarff in general.

"It's a queer start this yon fellow Millroy's ta'en," she said, as she opened with some deliberation a packet of postage-stamps and supplied the minister with those he had asked for.

"What start has he taken?"

"This notion o' rentin' The Miner's Rest. Hae ye no' heard about it, sir?"

"What, is Duncan going to give it up?" asked Mr. Reid, with diplomatic caution.

"Weel, I doubt there's naethin' settled about that as yet. But folk a' ken Duncan's had it in his heid this some time to tak' a house in Netherport; an' there's ane now he's after, that he'll tak' if they'll come to his terms. I suppose Millroy's minded to be first in the field, for there's safe to be a heap o' folk after The Miner's Rest. There's nae doubt it's a gude house, for them that can hae it on their conscience to sell drink. But it beats me to see what Millroy can want wi't — a house that needs a gude mistress, an' he wi' neither wife nor daughter that can be that for him. Let alane the cash he wad need to set the place up. Duncan's done a gude bit for the house himsel', and ye may wager he'll want his price."

"I suppose Millroy knows his own business," Mr. Reid said, affixing stamps to his letters in the leisurely manner befitting his momentary desire to let the woman talk. He was not without some anxiety himself regarding this strange proceeding of Millroy's, and deemed it possible he might extract some grains of useful information from the rubbish heaps of Mrs. Macneil's promiscuous rakings.

"There's nae mony folk wad gang wi' ye there, sir. I doubt Millroy's little better than a born natural, an' nae a'thegither a safe one. He's a dour look about him whiles, an' there's folk that thinks he might turn dangerous."

"That might be useful in the cause of temperance,

Mrs. Macneil," said the minister, laughing. "If he got The Miner's Rest, he would probably not be a very popular landlord."

"That's just the thing I cannot mak' out. Millroy's aye been maist consistent in his hatred o' the drink. An' what's ta'en him now to want to get into that house beats me a'thegither. There's nae sense in't!"

"Perhaps he's going to marry it."

"Sir?"

"I mean perhaps he has a wife in view, who has had some experience in managing a house of the sort. Maybe she's bringing capital into the business."

"Oh, I dinna think there's ony marryin' in the matter. But I wadna say but there may be someone at his back. My Mary cam' out frae Netherport wi' the train ae night, about a week syne, an' Millroy was down by at the station when the train cam' in. He was talkin' to a man that's quite a stranger here."

"Indeed? What was he like?"

"Mary didna weel see. He steppit into the train just as she got out. I wadna say but it's likely enough someone that's after the house, maybe puttin' Millroy forward, just because he's got the character o' bein' an extra sober man himsel'. It's a thousand pities there should be a licensed house in Glendarff ava. Eh, minister, but if ye'd only join the Good Templars, ye might do a heap to get it shut up."

"Possibly. But if I did, it is equally possible you might find that as far as the cause of temper-

ance is concerned, the last state would be worse than the first." And with that the minister prepared to depart. He had not the slightest inclination to pursue Mrs. Macniel's jerky, disconnected arguments in a flying skirmish round and round that particular arena; and her thoughts having once taken that special turn, he knew he was very unlikely to extract any further useful information from her.

Mrs. Macneil looked after him with a solemn shake of her head. "Yon man's no' easy in his conscience," she said to her daughter, who joined her at the moment. "He aye slinks aff if ye tackle him fair about the drink question. Eh, but it's an awfu' thing to think o' a minister clingin' that gait to self-indulgence!"

CHAPTER XVII

CLOUDS

FOR some time the course of true love ran very smoothly at Netherport manse. Total absence of all veneering quite prevented Ellen Crosbie's attractiveness from dwindling on closer acquaintance. There were no artificial graces for underlying disagreeable qualities to make havoc of, when caution was relaxed by greater intimacy. As she showed herself from the first, so she remained, a lively, intelligent girl, full of fun and frolic, and too guileless and candid to have any hidden chambers in her mind. If the sparkling ripple of her sunny nature had in it a suggestion of shallowness, it was at least untroubled by the heavy shadows and tumultuous heavings of deeper waters. Arthur Reid did not with suspicious insistency assure himself he was a very fortunate man, he only cherished a placid consciousness of the fact. But ere very long a few light clouds gathered, and they came floating across the sunshine from the direction of Craigmore. The minister arriving at the manse one day in time for the early dinner, found Ellen just returned from a visit to Mr. Duff, on some errand for her father, and it appeared she had gone

alone. Mrs. Crosbie seemed to consider engagement a sort of half-way house, at which the restraints of girlhood were relaxed, without the absolute freedom of matrimony being granted, for she had hitherto deemed a house without a mistress, and one where parties of men might perhaps be assembled, one not to be visited by her daughter without at least the companionship of one of her young brothers. Ellen was in high spirits, describing the splendours of Craigmore with a delighted appreciation which, in itself, rather rasped her lover's temper. His one visit to the house had left upon him the impression that in decoration and furniture a free hand had been given to some fashionable upholsterer, who had proceeded to use his advantages by turning the place into a sort of advertising showroom. Costly, ponderous, and tasteless, would have been his verdict.

Alone with him in the drawing-room after dinner, the girl renewed her glowing descriptions, while busy arranging the splendid greenhouse flowers she had brought back with her.

"Are they not superb, Arthur?" she asked, holding up a vase for his inspection.

"Magnificent," he said. "The gardener is an excellent one. They are about the only things that are tolerable up there."

"Oh, Arthur, how can you say so? I am sure the house is beautiful. The bedrooms are lovely."

"What were you doing in the bedrooms?"

"I went all over the house, to see it. I had never been in any room except the dining-room before."

"Who took you over it?"

"The housekeeper, Mrs. Baird. She is a widow, you know. Mr. Duff asked her to show me the house. Oh, how I would like to have a house like it!"

She was too busy with her flowers to notice the sudden flush that rose to the minister's face. He was silent for a moment. Then he said—

"I wish you would not go there, Ellen."

She looked at him in surprise. "Why not?" she asked.

"It isn't the sort of place for a girl of your age to go to alone."

She laughed merrily. "I do believe, Arthur, you are jealous! Why, you stupid fellow, Mr. Duff is past seventy, and has known me ever since I was a baby. Or are you afraid he keeps a store of fascinating young men up there?"

"I should feel quite easy as to any girl in your position meeting anyone at Craigmore in the least likely to fascinate her. Still, I do wish you would not go there without, at least, one of your brothers with you."

He did not intend to be peremptory, but he was intensely annoyed; and his intonation was certainly more that of command than of request. Ellen Crosbie coloured.

"You are strangely prejudiced against Mr. Duff, Arthur," she said.

"I know a great deal more about Mr. Duff than you do, my dear."

"Oh, I daresay. That is very likely. But I suppose you do not know more about him than

papa and mamma do, who have known him since you were quite a little boy. I don't think mamma would quite like your objecting to my going to a place she allows me to go to. She and papa have always treated Mr. Duff as a friend."

"I know that, and heartily wish it were not the case."

"Well, really, Arthur, I must say I think it is very strange that you, who are not a total abstainer, should be so bitter against Mr. Duff, while papa and mamma, who, you know, are very determined enemies to alcohol in any form, are quite friendly with him. If there was really anything against him, they would be sure to know it, having known him so long. I am afraid you are a very prejudiced man, sir. But I believe I know what makes you so."

"What?"

"Well, I know he is rough and blunt in his ways, and he does like teasing people. I am not sure I should like him myself, if I only knew as little of him as you do; and I ought not to wonder at your getting angry when I got in such a rage with him myself about poor Agnes Davidson. But, indeed, dear Arthur, he is a very good-natured man at heart, and he has been very kind to me."

"Well, well, we will not talk about him any more. Some day you will better understand what I feel."

It was all he could say. The old man had been allowed to be very kind to the girl, in so far as there was any kindness in amusing himself with her bright, fresh young presence, and in making

her gifts which cost him nothing he would ever miss. And her parents, either lacking knowledge of the world, or dazzled by the glamour of the man's reputed wealth, admitted him to their house on terms of intimacy. It was impossible for him to press his objections unless he could assign reasons which would prove them to have adequate grounds, and not to be merely the result of personal dislike. And that he could not do unless he could secure permission to repeat what he had heard in confidence.

In view of the occurrences of Ellen's last visit to Craigmore, he felt no hesitation in seeking to gain his end, by taking Dr. Munro into his confidence; and he seized an early opportunity of doing so.

"I congratulate you most heartily," Dr. Munro said, with a shadow stealing over his own face. "She is a charming girl, and one who I am sure will make an admirable wife. But, sorry though I am to say it, Reid, I fear I cannot agree to your hinting even at what I told you."

"But, my dear Munro, consider! You say the woman is a sort of lady housekeeper, and pleasing. After the old scoundrel doing this, she might be asked to the manse. Something ought to be done. It would go no farther. I am sure Mrs. Crosbie would never repeat it to a soul."

Dr. Munro smiled. His estimate of Mrs. Crosbie was not exactly identical with that of his friend, who for the present at least saw her to some extent illuminated by the reflection from the halo surrounding her daughter.

"Mrs. Crosbie," he said, "would simply be very indignant at what she would deem a most outrageous slander. And did you ever know a woman, Reid,—however excellent and sensible she may be," he added in a sort of hasty parenthesis,—“who when she believes anyone for whom she has a partiality is slandered, can resist inviting at least one bosom friend to share her indignation; and then!— Why, in a week the story would be on every tongue in Netherport.”

"I am sure you are needlessly cautious where Mrs. Crosbie is in question," said her intended son-in-law, a trifle loftily; and again the doctor's lips twitched slightly.

"I dare not risk it, my dear fellow. If the old rascal should go the length of allowing the woman to visit the manse, I would certainly reconsider the matter. But I do not think he will do so, and short of that I really dare not sanction your saying anything. The truth is, I stretched a point in even giving you the warning I did, doctors are so strictly bound to reveal nothing which comes under their observation professionally. But I could not bear to see such a good friend as you have been to me possibly entangled in a painful and damaging position before he had the least suspicion of any need for caution."

"Yet surely the matter is of more consequence to a young girl like Miss Crosbie than to me?"

"No, I think not; because it is so palpable that she would never have been allowed to enter the house but for the most absolute ignorance

of any objectionable circumstances. You, as a man, would not be beyond suspicion of carelessness or laxity, which would be very injurious to your character as a minister. The woman is so exceedingly quiet and unobtrusive, that I really believe no suspicions are abroad, and I dare not be the first to set them going."

The minister was unquestionably annoyed, and the fact was not lost upon his friend, who, however, troubled himself very little about the matter. A man of honest, upright life, heartily in love, has probably very nearly reached the climax of earthly bliss. But, unluckily, the emotional part of his nature is then apt to mount the throne on which reason should sit firmly, and the course of his judgments becomes as that of a rocket which has escaped the control of its guiding-stick. In any other case Dr. Munro's caution would have seemed to him honourable and prudent; but in the case of Ellen's mother it was really over-strained.

He was shortly doomed to chafe still more irritably under his restrictions. Mrs. Crosbie brought her daughter one afternoon to inspect the manse. It was a singularly pleasant one, a commodious, well-fitted-up house, standing somewhat above and back from the public road. Before it, a broad smooth lawn studded with shrubs and ornamental pines sloped down to a lofty solid holly hedge, flanking the road. Gravel footpaths, curving round the lawn amidst the shrubs, met at a short flight of stone steps, and an iron gate in the centre of the hedge. Behind the house was an excellent kitchen garden and small paddock. Ellen was in ecstasies,

‘Oh, mamma,’ she exclaimed, “it is a perfect little garden of Eden.”

“Very well, my love; you and Charlie can go and hunt for the inevitable snake,” Mrs. Crosbie said, laughing, “while I have a little chat with Arthur. And mind you kill it.”

“And now, my dear Arthur,” she said, as soon as they were alone, “I want to know what is this you have been saying to Ellen about Mr. Duff?”

“Merely that I wish she would not go to Craigmore alone.”

Mrs. Crosbie assumed a rather majestic air. “She goes with my knowledge and sanction,” she said.

“I am quite aware of that, but—I—I— Surely I am not very exacting in thinking my wishes might now have some weight with Ellen?”

“Certainly not, when they do not seem to imply a reflection on her mother. The fact is, Arthur, you made a grave mistake. If you have any reason, beyond mere caprice, for expressing such a wish, you should have explained it to me. Of course, Ellen does not go frequently to Craigmore alone. I should never think of allowing that. But an occasional visit to a man of Mr. Duff’s age, and an intimate friend of ours, is quite another thing.”

A little nettled by her somewhat didactic tone, her future son-in-law replied a trifle tartly—

“Yes, I am quite aware of the intimacy, and greatly regret it; though, of course, I have not a moment’s thought of dictating to you and Dr. Crosbie.”

“I should suppose not. We, on our part, regret

the strong prejudice you have always shown against Mr. Duff."

"I think you can hardly call it that, Mrs. Crosbie. You know my reasons. You may think I feel too strongly on the point, but you can hardly call it a mere prejudice. I will answer for it I know more of Mr. Duff's past history than you do. And it is for that reason," he added, catching his inspiration, "I dislike Ellen going there. I feel sure the house is one in which there is at least a possibility of very objectionable people being met. People of a class, also, whose objectionability a girl of Ellen's age, brought up as your daughter has been, would be very unlikely to detect."

The final compliment smoothed the ruffled waters. "I am glad you have explained," Mrs. Crosbie said graciously. "I fully believe your fears are groundless, but now I understand what you mean, I shall certainly give weight to your wishes. But what will you do when Ellen is your wife, my dear boy? She is naturally very fond of Mr. Duff. You will not find her very ready to drop the acquaintance."

"My wife will never enter Mr. Duff's house," was the reply the minister had on his lips. But, perhaps luckily, the return of the young people, and the appearance of tea, prevented it being spoken; and Arthur Reid felt, that considering his shackled condition, he had come out of the discussion better than he might have anticipated.

It was not very long, however, before, all unperceived by him, the clouds gathered heavily, and then with startling suddenness the storm broke

upon his head. The post, one morning, brought him a note from Ellen Crosbie, begging him to come to the manse that afternoon without fail. Dr. and Mrs. Crosbie were out for the day, and she had something very important to tell him. They should have time for a good long chat. He obeyed the summons, and she came to him in the drawing-room, flushed and excited.

"Oh, Arthur, such a wonderful thing has happened! I can hardly believe it myself. You will be forced to be friendly with Mr. Duff now."

"Confound Mr. Duff!" replied the profane minister. "What has he been doing?"

"Oh, don't speak that way, you naughty boy. You really don't deserve your good fortune. But I must tell you how it happened. Mamma thought she really ought to tell Mr. Duff about my engagement, because he has always been so kind to me. So a few days since she went to Craigmore, and told him of it."

"Well?" It was all he could say. His very heart seemed to be gripped by a sensation of dread foreboding. Mentally he apologised humbly to Dr. Munro for having resented his caution where Mrs. Crosbie was in question.

"Well, he seemed very much pleased about it. I believe at heart he really likes you, for all he cannot resist teasing you. He said all sorts of kind things, and he asked mamma when the marriage was to be. Of course, mamma told him we should have to wait some time, and he showed a great deal of interest in it, and asked a lot of

questions. He did not say anything then, but yesterday he came here, and said he wanted to speak to papa. After he was gone, papa came to the drawing-room, and he really quite frightened us. He looked half-dazed. Oh, Arthur, what do you think Mr. Duff had been saying?"

"That he would make you a very splendid wedding present, I suppose."

"Yes, indeed. Such a wedding present as very few girls get. He told papa he had always intended to leave me some money by will, and that he did not like long engagements. If we were married soon, he would undertake to make a settlement, so that I should have five thousand pounds down, and five thousand more at his death. Good gracious, Arthur! what is the matter? How white you are! Are you ill?"

"No, no. It is nothing—nothing; I shall be all right directly." And he rose, and walking to the window, stood staring out with eyes that saw nothing external.

"Arthur, what is the matter?" the girl said, after a moment's silence, following him to the window, and laying her hand on his arm. "You are surely ill? You look so strange. And you don't seem a bit glad!"

He put his arm round her, and kissed her. "Dear child," he said, "I feel quite bewildered. This is so sudden—so unexpected. And there are so many things to be taken into consideration. It is quite confusing."

"What things?"

"Oh, a heap of things which would not occur

to you," he said, groping vaguely after some excuse which might, for the moment, account for his lack of enthusiasm, and give him time to ponder over the best method of meeting this swift and sudden stroke. "I confess I feel it would be a very heavy obligation to lie under to Mr. Duff."

"Oh, you are so prejudiced against him!"

"No, no, dear. But we hardly know where we stand. A man who makes such an offer generally attaches some conditions."

The tears rose in the girl's eyes. "I am so disappointed, Arthur," she said. "I thought you would be so pleased."

"Dear, I am very sorry. But you know men have to think and look forward. This would be a very serious obligation to lay ourselves under to a man on whom we have no possible claim. We must move cautiously."

"Papa and mamma do not seem to think so much caution necessary," she said, pouting a little, "and I think they ought to be the best judges. Mamma can talk of nothing but Mr. Duff's great kindness. I wish now I had not asked you to come to-day, but waited until they were both at home. But I thought you would be so delighted, and that we should have time for such a nice long chat. Perhaps they would have been able to convince you it is not necessary to be so very cautious."

She ended with a little sob, and he could only soothe her with caresses and assurances of affection, striving as best he might to conceal the extreme perturbation of his own spirit. That he

was not very successful was abundantly shown by the rapid sobering down of the girl's delighted excitement, and the pitiful look of disappointment on her face when at last he contrived to find some excuse for leaving her.

He started for home by the road along the shore and up the glen. He could not face the shorter path over the hill. Whether this "princely liberality," as the world would term it, on the part of the old distiller, was solely prompted by affection for the girl who had been a favourite of his from childhood, or whether it was to some extent aimed at himself, out of a feline propensity to torment a victim over whom circumstances had given him some power, Arthur Reid felt somewhat uncertain. But had he followed the hill path, he would have fancied, at every step, the lynx eyes of the owner of Craigmore were peering at him from every nook and corner of the pleasure-grounds, in malicious glee over the dilemma in which this dextrous thrust had landed him. Moreover, he felt the restless desire for physical exertion characteristic of violent mental disturbance; and he strode along the road with a sort of feverish energy which excited wondering comment on the part of more than one passer-by. He walked the ten miles in a comparatively short space of time, still it was late when he reached home, and for more than an hour his housekeeper had been bewailing the gradually deteriorating dinner. Bringing with him no appetite for it, he still further harrowed her feelings by sending it away almost untouched. Then he retired to his study, and set himself to

the task of rallying and rearranging in regular order his scattered mental forces, so that they might enable him to face and solve the perplexing problem with which he was forced to grapple.

CHAPTER XVIII

AN EXPLOSION

IT was certainly with bewildering suddenness that Arthur Reid had reached a crucial point in his life. In his quiet study that night, in circumstances of great perplexity, and exposed to the force of strong conflicting currents of feeling, he must commit himself to a resolution irrevocable so soon as acted upon, and bound to shape and colour the course of his whole future life. He was very far from having attained to that serene altitude whence, basking in the cloudless sunshine of untarnished perfection, a man may gaze tranquilly upon the baleful fires of temptation, begriming with their murky glare the lower levels of human life. He was within the scorching glow of a very sharp temptation himself. For a man of his ardent temperament, eager to stand in the forefront of the battle against evil, life in Glendarff was dull and depressing, and his solitude at the manse, especially during the long dark winter nights, with no occupation save solitary studying, had been dismal in the extreme. He had a comfortable abode, but no home. How different it would be when Ellen Crosbie's bright, sunny presence was always shed-

ding light and warmth on the cold regularity of the well-ordered house; her merry, rippling laugh constantly waking the echoes of the silent walls. And now he had but to say the word, and within, perhaps, not more than a few weeks, he might bring her home to his manse, a loved and loving bride. Nor was it self alone that clamoured loudly for some relaxation of a too rigid, austere moral code. The happiness of the girl he had asked to be his wife was deeply implicated in his decision; so also was that of another, with even stronger claims upon him. Full well he knew how keenly his suffering mother felt the cruel necessity laid upon her so to straiten his income that to the uncongenial position forced upon him for her sake was added the loneliness of a man to whom home ties were forbidden. What a solace it would be to her many hours of pain and weariness to know that that burden at least was lifted from his life, and that a happy home, with a beloved wife, went far to make amends for the untowardness of outward circumstances. And this golden bait was not offered actually to him, it was rather passive acquiescence than active participation that was required of him. Had he even the right to expect from others action springing from principles of which they had never formed a conception?

But the question had another side, and a very black one, to contemplate. Whence came this money which was now offered to smooth his path to comfort and happiness? When he had regarded its possessor merely as a man who had amassed a large fortune as owner of an important distillery,

he had openly denounced it, declaring it an unclean thing to offer in sacrifice. Now he knew far more. It was but in part the old man's wealth had been heaped up by the profits of his distillery. To that had been added assiduous cultivation of the traffic in intoxicating drinks. Public-house after public-house had he acquired, in the most favourable localities for pushing a thriving trade; and whether sublet at exorbitant rents, or worked by trusty agents of his own, there was not one of them but bore an evil repute for absolute disregard of the public weal, and reckless pursuit of profit, to the last point legally safe, if not even beyond it. In one of them, at least, a man had been goaded along the path which had ended for him in the scaffold. Not a sixpence of that great fortune but was steeped in the tears of heart-broken wives, and of hapless children doomed to early graves or to moral degradation, weighted with the curses of husbands driven to desperation by their ruined homes and blighted lives. From how many dishonoured graves was the cry for vengeance arising perpetually to Heaven? The price of blood! Who did not hold it infamous to profit by money steeped in blood? But what was that infamy compared with the infamy of owing any portion of comfort and prosperity to wealth loaded with misery, crime, degradation, for thousands?

As the hideous picture grew in vigour of outline and vividness of colour, its fairer companion faded rapidly. A great flood of righteous indignation, pouring in, quenched the lurid fires of temptation, and he was bringing to face the question of what

would be the inevitable result of his decision, all the courage of a man strong enough to stand firmly by his ideals, when, like chaff before a hurricane, the whole subject was swept from his thoughts by a startling and unexpected incident. A sudden tremendous sound seemed to shake the very earth with the force of its reverberation. The house trembled, the windows rattled and shook, and a china vase, standing on a bracket fixed against the wall, fell shattered upon the floor. Dead silence followed. An explosion in the pits, was the thought that darted through his mind, and he hastily threw up the window and listened intently. All was, for the moment, still, and the first sound which caught his ear was the rapidly descending step of his housekeeper on the stairs. In a moment she burst into the room, half dressed, half dazed, and wholly terrified.

"Lord save us, sir!" she exclaimed. "What is it?"

"Something wrong at the pits, I fear. Hist! listen!"

A shrill cry—then a shout—broke the stillness, and a man's footsteps, running rapidly, passed the house. Mr. Reid caught up his hat, and hurried to the gate. A second man was passing hastily, but not in the direction of the pits.

"What is it?" asked the minister.

"I dinna ken, sir. It's an explosion o' some sort, up the village."

A confused murmur of voices began to be audible, and lights to flit about in the darkness, but exactly at what distance it was impossible to tell. The minister hastily followed the rapid steps

of the man with whom he had spoken. Around the door of The Miner's Rest an excited crowd was momentarily increasing. The night was very dark, but the flickering light of many lanterns quite sufficiently revealed a terrible spectacle. The house had been completely wrecked by some terrific explosion. Every window was shattered, and the house-door was lying on the road, at some yards' distance from the entrance. In the doorway, the solitary constable who represented the police force in Glendarff had taken his stand, and with disciplined composure was resolutely repulsing all attempts at intrusion. He recognised the minister, and made room for him to pass.

"What is it, Christie?" Mr. Reid asked.

"Dynamite, sir."

"Where? How?"

"Don't know yet, sir."

"Anyone hurt?"

"Duncan badly, sir. The mistress an' lassie are sair shaken, but no' sae bad. The doctor's here."

"Is that you, Reid?" called out Dr. Munro from the front room. "Come here."

The minister made his way over and amidst the fallen plaster and general wreckage into the front parlour of the house. Its floor was strewn thickly with powdered plaster and shattered fragments of glass and china. Broken and overturned furniture was strewn about, and at the back end of the room a huge ragged rent in the lath and plaster partition revealed the even more hopelessly ruined condition of the smaller back room. On a couch, hastily

righted, and dragged into the centre of the room, the landlord was lying, quite unconscious. The dazed, terrified women had been moved to a neighbouring house.

"Is he living?" the minister asked, in a whisper.

"Yes. But it is a bad case."

"What are you going to do with him? Will you take him to the manse?"

"No. My own house is nearer. They are getting a stretcher ready."

"How can it have happened?"

Dr. Munro put his lips close to his friend's ear and whispered the single word, "Millroy."

"Good God! Is that certain?"

"No, no. No one knows anything. It is my conviction, none the less. Here comes the stretcher. I have plenty of help. Do you stay here and help Christie to examine the place. Keep your eyes open. You may chance to detect some clue."

Just as the injured man was borne from the house, the two Mackenzies came hurrying up. Leaving one or two stalwart volunteer assistants on guard, to keep idle curiosity at a safe distance, the constable, aided by Arthur Reid, Mr. Mackenzie, and his son, proceeded to make as thorough an examination of the house as circumstances would allow. The schoolmaster, Tomlinson, who had been helping Dr. Munro, shortly joined them, in all the temporary importance of the person whose somewhat meagre information on the subject was still far beyond that of any other outsider. He had only left the house a few moments before the explosion occurred. It had always been his custom

to help Duncan with his books, and that very evening, as soon as the house was closed for the night, they had settled down for an hour's work in the small back parlour, Mrs. Duncan and the servant retiring to bed upstairs. He had left the house just as the clock struck eleven, and had only gone so short a distance when the explosion took place that he had been, for a moment, almost stunned himself. As soon as he had sufficiently recovered from the shock, he returned to the house, and with the aid of a few neighbours whom the report had already drawn to the spot, succeeded in making his way to the place where he knew Duncan would be. They found the unfortunate man—as they thought—dead amidst the general wreck, and had just succeeded in carrying him to the front room and laying him on the couch when Dr. Munro arrived. Neither he nor Duncan had heard any suspicious sounds during their hour of almost absolutely silent work.

It did not take the searchers long to discover where the explosion had taken place. Built against the wall of the very room the two men had occupied, there was a small outhouse, used for keeping tools, and odds and ends of all kinds. Dynamite had evidently been concealed here, and exploded by some means. The outhouse was a heap of shapeless ruins, and it seemed little short of miraculous that the unlucky landlord had not been killed on the spot.

"Who can have been guilty of such a dastardly outrage?" Mr. Mackenzie said, as the little group stood together at the back of the house, well out of

earshot of the observant public. "Have you any knowledge that provides a clue, Christie?"

The constable shook his head. He knew of nothing affording the faintest shadow of a clue. The landlord of The Miner's Rest was a quiet enough man, not wholly above suspicion as to the hours at which, and the people to whom drink was sold, but keeping a respectable house, and living at peace with all his neighbours.

"It may be the work of someone from a distance," suggested Alan Mackenzie.

"It's easy enough dune, if onybody has a mind to do it," replied Christie. "Ye see, a man could slip along in the night among a' these gardens and bit places, an' ne'er a saul get a hint o't, an' be a lang gait aff before the thing exploded."

"True," said the manager. "But then, you see, the man who could scramble over all these fences, and find his way among all these small enclosures, on such a dark night as this, must know the place pretty accurately."

"That's so, sir. But when a man's bent on this sort o' mischief, he learns his bearings pretty quick. There's just ae thing we might try, an' that's whether the mistress can be got to gie us a hint o' onybody that had ill-will at her man. We might get on the track that way."

The attempt proved very futile. Mrs. Duncan, still half stupefied, would do nothing but wail and lament, and all the answer which could be got to the question was, "He was aye gude to everyone. What wad onybody hae ill-will at him for?"

Finding nothing more could be got from the

woman, the attempt was abandoned. The wrecked house was left in charge of a watcher, until the arrival of daylight, and more trained investigators. Then the crowd dispersed, and after ascertaining that Dr. Munro had no need of his aid, the minister returned home.

The doctor's startling suggestion weighed heavily on his mind. If it were really true that the murder of Kelly and the wrecking of The Miner's Rest were alike due to the insane impulses of a monomaniac dwelling in the village, whose condition was wholly unsuspected save by two people tolerably safe from his machinations, the public safety certainly demanded that the matter should be at once investigated. Yet, as the case stood, there was nothing to justify casting the slightest imputation on John Millroy. There was, however, a possibility of securing scraps, at least, of suggestive information, and in pursuit of them Arthur Reid paid a visit to Mrs. Aitken, the garrulous old widow with whom Millroy lodged. His intention for once was to fill the place of passive listener to gossip, with the right reserved of a leading question, now and again, as opportunity offered.

"Eh, minister," exclaimed the old woman, as she saw him enter, "but this is an awfu' set-out! Hae ye heard how puir Duncan is the day?"

"I called as I passed. He seems to have rallied slightly, and Dr. Munro is rather more hopeful than last night. But he is in a very serious condition."

"Puir body! I never heard the like! Me and John was talkin' ower it the morn. John said he

wad hae thought Duncan was the last man ony-body wad want to hurt. A ceevil, quiet body."

"Ah, by the way," said the guileful minister, "I did not see Millroy anywhere about last night. Were you and he both so sound asleep you did not hear the explosion?"

"Hear it? My word, that did we. The very cups and saucers rattled. But as for John no' bein' about,"—and she laughed,—“weel, he couldna vera weel gang out, for he hadna a pair o' breeks to gang in."

"Really? How was that?" asked the minister, laughing.

"Weel, his best pair were a gude bit soiled, sae I'd pit them in the washin'-tub. An' when he cam' hame frae work, his ither pair had a sair rent in them. He was rather pit about, sae I said if he'd gang till his bed in gude time, I'd pit a patch on before I gaed to bed mysel'. He went up to his bed soon after nine, but I'd a hantle odd things to do, an' didna set down to the wark till just on eleven. I'd just got the piece cut out, when the explosion came. John cam' rinnin' down the stairs in his sark, an' I says, 'Eh, John,' says I, 'what's up the noo?' An' he says, says he, 'I doubt, mistress, it'll be somethin' gane wrang at the pits. Can I no' get my breeks?' But they werena fit for him to pit on, sae he slippit out in the darkness, an' lookit down the street. An' he says, says he, 'The folk are gatherin' down the road. I canna just tell whaur, for the darkness; but it canna be at the pits.' Then, in a wee while, Sandy Niven cam' rinnin' by, an' he tauld us what it was."

"Lucky for Millroy it was not your house that was wrecked," remarked Mr. Reid. "He'd have had to turn out then, breeks or no breeks. How did he manage to come by such an unlucky accident?"

"I dinna just remember. But I think he said he was gettin' ower a fence, an' there was a nail stickin' out."

This limited amount of sustenance for his suspicions against Millroy was handed on by the minister to his friend, later in the day.

"There are no fences to be climbed over between the pits and his lodgings," was Dr. Munro's brief comment.

"But, my dear Munro, he is pretty well accounted for. He could not have gone out in his shirt to explode the dynamite. Besides, the house has no back entrance; he could not have left it without being seen by Mrs. Aitken."

"I can't explain it. I confess I do not see myself how it can be possible, yet I cannot shake off the conviction the explosion was Millroy's work. I feel certain that man is a monomaniac, and the cunning of monomaniacs would baffle the very devil himself."

"But what, then, of his visit to Duff?"

"A blind, most likely. But I don't suppose we shall ever get any light upon it. The worst of these sort of devils is they generally work entirely alone, without a soul knowing what they are at; and it is that renders it so extraordinarily difficult to trace out what they are at. If Duncan could give any information, we might chance to work out

something. But if he does recover, it will be a long time, if ever, before he is able to tell anything at all about what happened."

Musing anxiously over these strangely tangled perplexities, Mr. Reid was walking towards the manse, when, as he was passing the mournful skeleton of The Miner's Rest, a voice from within the building exclaimed, "Hi, Mr. Reid! stop a minute, I want to speak to you." And almost before he had time to recall whose voice it was, Mr. Duff came out of the house.

The minister ground his teeth with annoyance. He would have readily admitted himself that he was probably swayed by irritated sensitiveness, but he could never shake off the impression that the old man regarded him much as a cat does a mouse. And to encounter him at this moment!—Then he took courage in the remembrance of the extreme improbability of Mr. Duff being, as yet, aware he knew of the offer made to his intended wife.

"I tell you what it is, young man," said the old distiller, "I believe you are a sort of condensed essence of everything angelic."

"Really? Your opinion is very flattering."

"Yes, I'm sure of it. The presence of the angelic always stirs up the devil, you know, and upon my word he has been pretty busy in this parish since you came to it. Murder, suicide, and dynamite!"

"Is it my presence here that has attracted you?" the minister calmly asked. "I am assured that it is something quite new for you to be seen so often in Glendarff as you have been lately."

"Good! good!" exclaimed Mr. Duff, chuckling delightedly. "As fair a hit back as ever I knew. By Jove, I wish I'd had the bringing-up of you. I'd have made a man of you."

"Or a devil? If you have nothing more to say to me, Mr. Duff, you must excuse my leaving you. I have plenty to do this afternoon."

"Oh, but I have other things to say to you. They tell me you were looking over this place last night. What did you make out?"

"Absolutely nothing, save that dynamite had been concealed in an outhouse, and exploded there."

"And whose cursed work is it?"

"Wrecking your property?"

"You don't catch me that way, youngster. I know what people say, and I know you're dying to know if it's true. But I'm not going to gratify you by saying either one thing or the other. How's Duncan?"

"In great danger. But not in an absolutely hopeless state."

"And what does your parishioner, Mr. Millroy, say to this business?"

"I have not seen Millroy since it happened, until this moment, when I perceive him yonder, behind you, returning from his work; so you can ask him any questions you like, yourself."

Mr. Duff turned round. "Hulloa, sir," he said, as Millroy drew near. "You're the man who wanted to have The Miner's Rest. Had you come to any terms?"

"No, sir."

"And what do you think about it now?"

"Just what I thought before, sir."

"What, do you want to rent a ruin?"

"I wad think the house could be repaired again."

"Faith, I doubt it'll be something more than repairing will be needed here. I suspect it'll be rebuilding, from the very foundation. The scoundrel has done his work thoroughly."

"Weel, sir, if ye dinna mean to rebuild it, I doubt there'll soon be anither house set up. Glendarff's no' just the place to do without a public-house."

"Who said I'd anything to do with it?"

"I ken what I ken, sir," answered the man, with perfect coolness; and then he turned to the minister, who had been watching him closely. "Ye'll hae been hearin' how puir Duncan's gettin' on, I doubt, sir. Is he rallyin' ony?"

"He is living, and Dr. Munro thinks the case not quite hopeless. That is about all that can be said."

Millroy shook his head. "Puir body! it's a sad business. I ken somethin' o't, for I'd a sair shakin' mysel' ance, wi' some dynamite goin' off sudden like, an' I ken it's a terrible commandin' thing. I doubt it'll be lang ere Duncan will be about again."

He walked on as he spoke. Neither look, voice, nor manner betrayed the faintest trace of anything suspicious. The minister also made an attempt to escape from his unwelcome companion, but in vain.

"Going to the manse?" Mr. Duff asked. "I'll walk along with you."

"I'm not going to the manse," replied Mr. Reid developing a sudden purpose to suit the circumstances. "I am going to visit a sick parishioner."

"Very well. I'm going home over the hill; I'll walk so far with you."

That was a deal farther than the minister desired; but at least he had avoided all necessity for asking his tormentor into the manse.

"Well," the old man said, as they walked on together, "so I brought you up to the scratch, did I?"

"I am not aware of having been either scratched, or scratching."

"Ha, ha! No, of course not. The scratching comes afterwards. It's all kissing just now. But you found out, mighty quick, how soon you and my little girl were going to make it up, after I told you what I intended doing."

"Really, Mr. Duff, I do not think we need discuss that matter. My intended marriage to Miss Crosbie is not likely to take place for a very considerable time, so any intentions of yours concerning it are a long way from their fulfilment. And many things may happen in the meantime."

"Oh yes, I understand. I see you have been told what I intend doing. Of course, an old fellow who is past seventy may chance to kick the bucket meantime. That would be a rare stroke of luck, wouldn't it?"

White with anger, the minister stopped dead. "Mr. Duff," he said, "I entirely decline to walk

another step with you. Whether you do it through ignorance, malice, or both, I know not, but you make inquiries into my private affairs, most impertinent in themselves, a means of insulting me with abominably offensive suggestions. That is a thing I cannot be expected to stand. Even did my profession not forbid it, it would be impossible for a man of my age to administer to one of yours the personal chastisement which is the only fitting reply to your insolence ; so I simply bid you good afternoon."

He turned on his heel and strode away without waiting for any reply. The old distiller stood looking after him with his evil smile. "Go it, my young cock," he muttered to himself. "But I've got you on the hip. You chose to turn up your pious nose at my money. See if I don't make my money double-thong you to some purpose for your impudence!"

CHAPTER XIX

A WARNING

THE tragedy of The Miner's Rest remained an inscrutable mystery. Neither that superlative person, the amateur detective, gifted in his own estimation with the keen instincts of the Red Indian, united to the intellectual subtilty of a Macchiavelli, nor that ever-blundering and obtuse professional brother, on whom he looks down with such sublime contempt, could make anything of the case. Millroy's proceedings had been indirectly investigated ; for, at the request of Inspector Welsh, Mr. Mackenzie had instituted a searching inquiry into the doings of all the pitmen on that particular day, but without lighting on anything calculated to throw the slightest suspicion on anyone. Mrs. Duncan, when sufficiently recovered from the shock she had received to bear questioning on the subject, was equally unable to throw any light upon the occurrence. What she had moaned out in her half-dazed bewilderment, she could only repeat when her faculties had regained their normal condition. Her husband was a singularly quiet, inoffensive man, without, as far as she knew, an enemy in the world. Inspector Welsh, albeit devoid of

amateur ability for laying bare all mysteries with one sweep of the moral scalpel, acquiesced in the probability of Dr. Munro's opinion. "I doubt there's just been one, and only one hand in it. It's a desperately hard matter to trace out anything of the kind when a man has worked entirely alone, and chattered to no one." The shattered wreck of the once trim, tidy house, with roughly boarded-up doors and windows, stood a melancholy, silent evidence of moral malignity, and material helplessness to resist or avenge its fell onslaught.

Arthur Reid's thoughts had been turned, and a breathing-space obtained for him by the explosion. But the tenor of Mr. Duff's remarks had shown him there was no time to be lost in coming to a clear understanding, and taking up a definite position at Netherport manse; and, in truth, when his anger subsided, he felt the old distiller's coarse insinuations had greatly aided to clear his way for him. He had despatched a hasty note to Ellen, the morning after the explosion, explaining his non-appearance that afternoon, and promising to call the following day. But when he reached the manse, it was Mrs. Crosbie, not Ellen, who received him.

"My dear Arthur," she said, "what a dreadful thing is this explosion! Really, the doings in your parish are very terrible. Your parishioners must be a very sad set of people."

"Mr. Duff was in Glendarff yesterday," replied the minister. "He seems to regard my influence there as mainly responsible for these occurrences."

"Arthur, what do you mean? You must have misunderstood him."

"There was no room for misunderstanding. But I am bound to allow he assigned as a reason the tendency of angelic qualities to rouse the devil to special activity."

"Oh, I understand. One of his little jokes. He is always full of them, dear old man! He is a great tease."

"He certainly does not seem to me singularly happy in his conception of the gentle art of joking."

"Oh, you must not be too fastidious. Of course, Mr. Duff is not a very refined man. He has not had your educational advantages, and his early life must have been a very rough one. But of his kindness of heart and generosity there can be no doubt, at least on our part. But now, Arthur, you must really tell me what you have been saying to Ellen. I could see she had been crying when I returned home the other evening, and she seemed quite puzzled and disappointed, dear child, at the manner in which you had received Mr. Duff's generous proposal."

The minister remained silent for a moment. There was no use in fencing with the inevitable; still, he did not wish to seem needlessly harsh and abrupt in his methods.

"I am afraid Ellen was a little disappointed at my being less enthusiastic than herself," he said at last. "But, of course, many things occurred to me, in connection with Mr. Duff's offer, which were not likely to strike a girl of her age."

"Neither Dr. Crosbie nor myself are young girls, Arthur, and I confess we do not see the need for such extreme caution. In truth, I must admit it seems to us a little ungracious."

"Yes. But then you know the exact terms of Mr. Duff's proposal, which I do not. And then you and Dr. Crosbie have always taken a different view of the question of Mr. Duff's fortune from that which I hold, and one which renders the matter much simpler for you than for me."

"I really do not understand."

"You know I object, on principle, to large fortunes resulting from the manufacture or sale of intoxicating drinks, and that objection I have openly stated. For me to do this, and then accept any benefit from a fortune so acquired, is a very serious matter."

"Yes, I know, and have always regretted what I must call your exaggerated views on this point. But I must remind you," she added loftily, "the offer is made to my daughter, not to you."

"True. That is the only point which prevents my acting much more promptly. But the circumstances hardly allow of Ellen and myself being considered separately. Moreover, in this case the question is not solely of a fortune made by the manufacture of ardent spirits. There are more serious charges against Mr. Duff's wealth."

"Not to my knowledge."

"No. But to mine. Mr. Duff is an extensive holder of licensed houses, and the majority of them, at least, are of very doubtful reputation."

"I do not believe a word of it. Someone has

been imposing on you with an outrageous piece of scandal."

"I wish there was any room to hope I had been deceived, Mrs. Crosbie; but that is unfortunately not the case. If Dr. Crosbie will ask Inspector Welsh about it, he will hear what will, I am sure, surprise him much. Welsh lighted on a good deal of information concerning Mr. Duff in his investigations over the murder of Kelly."

"I am quite sure my husband will not think of asking any such questions," replied Mrs. Crosbie, colouring angrily. "That is just like the police. They go poking and prying about, when a crime is committed, and they never find out anything that helps to bring the criminal to justice; only a lot of scandal about the characters of people who have nothing to do with the matter."

"If Mr. Duff had not happened to be the owner of the house Kelly worked in Edinburgh, his name would never have come into the business at all. I doubt if anyone was more surprised than Welsh himself, when he discovered where his investigations were leading him. But even this fact does not exhaust the difficulties of the matter for me. Mr. Duff has treated me with such offensive rudeness, that the thought of being in any way indebted to him is, I admit, very repugnant to me."

This was really growing serious. Mrs. Crosbie felt herself fully justified in regarding her intended son-in-law as somewhat fanatical. Still, strange as it seemed, Mr. Duff had so worded his proposal as to make it appear the offer was contingent on her daughter becoming the wife of that fanatic.

It was therefore clearly important every possible effort should be made use of to curb his quixotic propensities.

"My dear Arthur," she began very seriously, "you are really allowing feeling to override common sense. As I said before, Mr. Duff is fond of teasing people, and he is an unpolished man, ill calculated to understand the feelings of a man of education and refinement like yourself. But surely this offer to Ellen, the moment he heard of the engagement, in order to smooth the way to an immediate marriage, is quite sufficient proof what his true sentiments towards you are. He knows your opinions about his fortune, and likes to tease you, while at heart I am sure he has a sincere regard for you. And indeed, my dear boy, your opinions on that point are exaggerated. You know how strongly both Dr. Crosbie and I feel about the liquor traffic—far more consistent in that question we are than you, sir! You may surely trust to our judgment not being biassed in Mr. Duff's favour. But what would you have? If Mr. Duff's whole fortune were placed at your disposal, to make restitution to those who have suffered from the sale of spirits manufactured in his particular distillery, how in the world are you going to find them out? The whole of the funds would be spent in the effort. It would be most quixotic to plead the claims of those who perhaps never drank a thimbleful of spirits for the manufacture of which he is responsible, as standing at all against him."

Mrs. Crosbie, confident of the invulnerability of

her arguments, beamed quite benignantly on her visitor. But his grave expression did not relax.

"The question is difficult, I admit," he said, "and I cannot expect everyone to see with my eyes. I can only hope we may find some satisfactory way of arranging it. I suppose it need not be settled at this exact moment?"

"Oh, well, not absolutely before the clock strikes again. But, you know, Mr. Duff dwells especially on his objection to long engagements. His wishes must have full consideration."

Ellen Crosbie entered at the moment, and saved her lover from the necessity of finding any reply. He remained for some time chatting with her and her mother, but the consciousness of clashing opinions on a subject of common interest, respecting which unanimous action was imperative, produced a feeling of constraint, and he was glad enough when he found an opportunity of getting away from the house.

"What does Arthur mean, mamma?" the girl said, as soon as she and her mother were alone. "He is not in the least like himself to-day."

"Oh, I have no doubt he is much upset by this terrible business at Glendarff. Really, it is trying. So many horrors in succession. And he is a tiresome enthusiast, and quite ridiculously sensitive about Mr. Duff's little jokes. But you must have patience. You will soon cure him of all these notions, I have no doubt. People living so much alone as he does are sure to take up notions."

With that, Mrs. Crosbie went off to pay some visits, an occupation from which she did not return

in a very serene frame of mind. Now that she regarded the forthcoming marriage as a rapidly approaching and most auspicious event, she had been unable to resist taking sundry friends into her confidence regarding her daughter's resplendent prospects. The consequences could easily be foretold by any shrewd observer of human nature. There were in Netherport not a few mothers of portionless daughters. They could not be expected to regard with placid satisfaction this sudden transformation of the daughter of the manse into a considerable heiress, for her position. The material advantages of the golden shower being indisputable, the only course open for candid criticism was to befoul the source. Mr. Duff's banknotes, when extracted from him for philanthropic purposes, doubtless underwent a cleansing process. But when bestowed as a marriage dower on the penniless daughter of someone else, they could hardly be expected to carry with them a blessing, considering how entirely they were the fruit of the manufacture of intoxicating drinks. Mrs. Sloan, the wife of a local lawyer and bank agent, with five plain and portionless daughters on her hands, felt herself especially aggrieved, and her resentment carried her fairly over the border between acute disapproval of commercial transactions and personal slander. It struck her with a force never before asserting itself on that particular subject, that there was something needing explanation about Mrs. Baird's position at Craigmore, and that there was at least the possibility old Mr. Duff was an evil liver, any intimacy with whom

was a grave discredit to a minister's family. She naturally confided these uneasy suspicions to her intimate friends, listening with the keenest interest to the piquant suggestions which they were pleased to dignify with the style and title of corroborative evidence. All these choice sprouts of public opinion had been gathered and carefully preserved for Mrs. Crosbie by Mrs. Gillespie, on whom she chanced to call that afternoon. Her excited agitation was naturally most gratifying to the narrator.

"I never heard such monstrous, such disgraceful slanders," Mrs. Crosbie exclaimed.

Mrs. Gillespie made an expressive gesture. "Of course, I do not go into the question of truth or falsehood. No one dislikes slander and gossip more than I do. But I felt it would only be right to let you know what is being said, so that you may judge for yourself what course you ought to take."

"It is abominable! perfectly abominable! Of course, I do not personally know Mrs. Baird, but I am sure she is an exceedingly quiet, respectable person, in manner and appearance. Quite a superior-looking woman, indeed."

"Exactly, my dear. You have most accurately described the difficulty of the situation. Mrs. Baird is a fine, handsome-looking woman. She always sits at the head of the table, and is treated quite as a lady housekeeper. I have observed myself that the close carriage always takes her to the station, and goes to meet her, just as it does with Mr. Duff himself. Yet she neither visits, nor is

seem to resent my hitting him back ; and it seems as if he had come near making a marriage with me a condition of his thus handsomely dowering Miss Crosbie."

"Oh, he has always intended to leave her a good fortune. But they do not know him really, any better than you do. He is a strange mixture. He has always been fond of her, and when that is the case he can be very kind, even generous. But he hates you."

"Why?"

"Because he is purse-proud and overbearing, and he is used to be toadied for his wealth. He likes it, and he cannot tolerate you because he knows you despise both it and him. At the same time, you attract him to a certain extent, and he does really enjoy your sharp retorts ; but his true sentiments towards you are vindictive. He is always very vindictive towards anyone he dislikes."

"Yet he proposes indirectly to bestow a very large sum on me."

"Yes. But not from any friendly feeling towards you, as you will find out to your cost, if you do not stand on your guard. He will not hesitate to sacrifice the happiness of the girl he professes to love, if he can strike at you through her. Or, rather, he so entirely believes money to be everything in this world, that he would think he could quite make up to her for any unhappiness he might cause her, by increasing her fortune. You could hardly shut your door in the face of a man who had so handsomely dowered your wife. Therefore, I warn you, make your own and her happiness safe



by putting a long distance between you and him as soon as possible."

"What if I were to refuse all participation in his wealth?"

"You will lose your wife. He already counts on that possibility, and believing that you love her, holds himself master of the situation either way."

"He will not succeed in coming between Ellen and me," said the young lover confidently.

Mrs. Baird shook her head. "Not directly, perhaps," she said, "but indirectly, through her parents. They are worthy enough people in their way, but they are about as worldly-minded as a good many others who believe themselves very pious. He will simply offer a higher bribe. He can well do that, for he has not a single relative in the world. He spent a large sum, a few years since, in ascertaining that fact. His only brother, with an uncle and his family, whom he was accompanying to America, were all lost at sea many years ago, so he is quite alone in the world. He knows well enough how to make his wealth aid him in carrying out any purpose on which he sets his mind."

"The old fiend! How can you make up your mind to remain in his house?"

He asked the question in pure forgetfulness, absorbed by his own personal interest in what he had heard. A grave, sad smile passed over Mrs. Baird's face.

"There are some paths in life," she said, "in which it is impossible to turn. That is very terrible when the track is so stony that your feet are

bleeding at every step. Therefore I warn you to take good heed you do not adventure yourself on such a path. Keep your purpose to yourself, and the moment your marriage is accomplished, move to a safe distance from here. Thus you will check-mate him before he has time to work any mischief for you."

She had clearly no suspicion of his view of the question, and he did not feel inclined to enlighten her. "I thank you most heartily, Mrs. Baird," he said, "for the warning you have given me; and whether or not I follow your advice, I shall always feel grateful for the kindly interest you have shown in me and my future wife. You have done me a service, also, in removing all doubt about Mr. Duff's sentiments towards me. I have never been able to shake off a strong conviction of his dislike to me, yet I had no such proof of it as would have justified my acting upon it."

"You need entertain no doubt upon the point. I think he has a sort of dread of you. But his dislike amounts to positive antipathy."

And with that assurance on Mrs. Baird's part, they went on their respective ways.

CHAPTER XX

SHREDS OF TWEED

THIS conversation had by no means tended to smooth away the perplexities in which Arthur Reid found himself involved. But once again a *Deus ex machina* intervened on his behalf, throwing back indefinitely any necessity for his immediately committing himself to an irrevocable step. When he reached the manse, he found on his study-table a telegram. His mother's illness had assumed a very serious aspect, and his instant presence was indispensable. He drew a sigh of relief. Mrs. Baird's promptly and unhesitatingly expressed opinion as to the result of his refusing any participation in Mr. Duff's wealth had greatly depressed him, notwithstanding his proudly vaunted confidence in his lady-love, for the thought of her parents filled him with gloomy misgivings. He dearly loved the girl, and the prospect of this fatal gold coming between them was very bitter to him. But not even for her sake was to be borne either the degradation of falling in action below his own standard in principle, or the humiliation of being forced to acknowledge a benefactor in Mr. Duff. Now it was at least possible a

third course might open for him. He wrote at once a hasty note of explanation to Mrs. Crosbie, a longer one to Ellen; then set himself to make the needful arrangements, for which he had but short time before the departure of the next train.

He reached his mother's house late at night, to find the situation a somewhat harassing one. The sudden turn her illness had taken was a very serious one, the results were very uncertain. She might linger for some few weeks, or even possibly for a month or two, but it was equally possible the end might come with great suddenness. It was clearly out of the question that her son should leave her again, so his only course was at once to seek a fitting substitute, to take charge of his parish for him until he should be able to return.

"I am so very glad, my Arthur," the worn, suffering woman said, with her wasted hand clasped in that of her son. "The weary waiting will soon be over for me; the burden be lifted from your shoulders. You will soon be able to take your wife home now. I have but one regret—that I have never seen her."

The task of finding a substitute did not turn out difficult. An Indian missionary, come home to recruit his health after a serious illness, was glad enough to occupy the healthily-situated manse, and undertake the easy duties which were all that were required of him. And Arthur Reid was left to watch the faint flickering of his mother's slowly sinking life with a deeply saddened heart, but with his perplexed anxiety almost wholly removed. He could lay the future entirely aside for the

moment, well knowing that before any further question of his marriage could be brought forward, he would be able to take a wholly different position from that he had hitherto occupied.

The perusal of the minister's hasty note caused Mrs. Crosbie such excessive annoyance that she almost felt as though she had a personal grievance to allege against his dying mother. Her favouring star seemed to have mounted rapidly to its zenith, only to sink with equal rapidity towards its nadir. A chill dread began to creep over her that the air of triumphant meekness which she had made it her aim to wear might prove to have been donned prematurely.

"What does he say about returning?" she asked her daughter in a fretful tone.

"Nothing, mamma. He says it will depend on how he finds his mother, and that he will write again to-morrow."

The morrow's letter brought anything but comfort to Mrs. Crosbie's perturbed soul; and she turned to her placid, easy-going husband for counsel, or perhaps, it would be more correct to say, found in him a fitting receptacle for the outpouring of her grievances.

"It is the most annoying and unfortunate occurrence," she said. "Ellen tells me Arthur is deeply attached to his mother, so, of course, one must feel much sympathy with him. Still, I do most devoutly wish the poor woman had taken some other opportunity of being dangerously ill."

"Really, my love," replied Dr. Crosbie, "that

sounds a little unfeeling. But why should you distress yourself so much? There is no such immediate hurry about our arrangements."

"My dear, that is not the difficulty. It is the wretched state of uncertainty in which we are left, and the impossibility of explaining matters. When I talked to Arthur the other day, it did really seem as if he intended to carry his fantastic scruples the length of refusing to benefit in any way by Mr. Duff's generosity. I was expecting some further and conclusive communication from him."

"If that is the position he means to take up," replied Dr. Crosbie in a tone which clearly indicated his consciousness that he was the father of an heiress, "I shall certainly insist on the marriage being broken off. The case is very different now from when we believed Ellen would come to him undowered. He ought to remember he has very little to offer in return for the fortune she will bring him."

"Marriages are not always quite so easy to break off as you seem to think," said his wife irritably. "Ellen is very deeply attached to Mr. Reid. There is her health and happiness to be considered. Besides, you quite miss the point of the difficulty. Mr. Duff made this offer in order to facilitate this particular marriage. There is no doubt he is somewhat imperious in disposition. He is the last man likely to submit tamely to having a slight put upon him. If the marriage were broken off, in consequence of Mr. Reid's far-fetched notions, how can we be sure he will not withdraw his offer? It is altogether most annoy-

ing and perplexing. If I had had the least suspicion Mr. Reid was so dreadfully deficient in common sense, I would never have allowed the engagement."

Mrs. Crosbie's point of view respecting her daughter's matrimonial affairs had undergone a great change during the last few weeks. Heretofore, a minister, possessing an excellent manse and settled income, even though afflicted with crotchets, had appeared to her, with some aid from Mr. Duff thrown in, a very desirable suitor. But since the old man's intentions had shown such unexpected magnificence, she could pass in review several possible rivals. Young men whose professions, or possession of wealthy connections, gave them prospects for the future far beyond what might be hoped for from a minister; and, who were thus, with Ellen's fortune to help the present position, more eligible husbands than Arthur Reid. In her annoyance over this fresh delay, she came very near saying, at least to herself, that had Ellen not unluckily fallen in love with this young man, she might have lived to see her mistress of a mansion as magnificent as Craigmore.

Dr. Crosbie's jaw dropped a little. The contingencies suggested by his wife had never occurred to him. His ponderous mental forces did not skirmish over half so wide an extent of moral ground as did his wife's light troops. But, after brief reflection, he showed that he could bring them to bear with effect on a given point.

"I think you are disquieting yourself needlessly. We must hope to bring Mr. Reid into a more

reasonable frame of mind. Meantime, we must tacitly assume that we shall succeed in so doing, and allow Mr. Duff to suppose the matter is practically settled. This uncertainty about Mrs. Reid, and the evident fact that in event of her death an immediate marriage would be most unseemly, will be quite sufficient reason to assign for no further business arrangements being proceeded with at present."

But Mrs. Crosbie, being fairly started on the war-path in search of grievances, was not to be thus unresistingly disarmed. "That is all very well," she said, "but for quite another reason this delay is most annoying to me. This horrid scandal about Mrs. Baird is distressing me extremely. I never knew anything so utterly disgraceful as the way in which it is being spread. Not a word was ever heard of it until now, and it is quite clear it has been got up out of pure spite and envy. Still, though we know it is absolutely false, a number of people believe it, and of course, were there a word of truth in it, Mr. Duff would be a most unsuitable person for intimacy in a minister's house. It is most trying. I was speaking to Mr. Duff in the street the other day, when Mrs. Sloan and one of her daughters passed. I could see the way they looked, and I felt myself colour. I am sure Mr. Duff must have noticed it. If the marriage was only over, and everything settled down, it would all soon die out."

"Well, my love, we cannot put a stop to people's chattering, and we cannot hinder people from dying at inconvenient times, so the only thing to

do is to make the best of it," replied Dr. Crosbie, greatly helped to this obvious piece of philosophy by his desire to get rid of the subject, and give his attention to a new pamphlet he was particularly anxious to read.

The sudden and unexpected departure of his friend and constant companion was a cause of much lamentation to Dr. Munro, although he professed himself quite unable to answer Mr. Mackenzie's question, whether he was Jonathan without David, or David without Jonathan? He found some solace, however, in the society of the minister's substitute, Mr. Renwick, a very agreeable man, and in all country pursuits a greater proficient than Arthur Reid's town bringing-up had ever allowed him to become. Thus it fell out, one morning, when Dr. Munro found himself in the rare position of having a spare day on his hands, that the two started early for one of the lower reaches of the glen, with the intention of fishing back up the burn, a large enough one to almost have a claim to be termed a small river, and containing very fine trout. But the water flowed between abrupt rocky banks, thickly fringed, for the most part, with copse-wood, and the walking was consequently very tiring. Mr. Renwick was, as yet, by no means very robust, and by the time they reached a lovely and seductive pool, immediately behind the village, vouched for by Dr. Munro as containing excellent trout, he announced his intention of having a rest, his sandwich, and a cigar, before he worked any more. Some twenty yards below the pool, where the water sparkled merrily over a broad shallow,

the march fence between two farms ran down to the edge of the burn, and to prevent sheep from straying, a water-gate had been erected. Close by this water-gate the two men sat down and lunched, and just as Mr. Renwick had lighted his cigar, rather to his surprise Dr. Munro got up, and without a word began to scramble along this somewhat impracticable bridge. Mr. Renwick watched him with some amusement, and not without the hope, inevitable under the circumstances to any healthily constituted mind, that he would tumble into the water. The doctor, however, made good his progress to nearly the centre of the bridge, whence, after apparently occupying himself for a time with some minute object, he cautiously worked his way back to land.

"Was that a mere feat of gymnastics," asked Mr. Renwick, "or had the journey an object?"

"It had an object. My eyesight is rather keen, and I observed something of which I wished to possess myself. What do you call those?" he asked, showing something lying in the palm of his hand.

"Well," answered Mr. Renwick, with profound gravity, "I should be disposed to consider it safe to hazard the opinion that they are shreds of a piece of coarse tweed. Were they worth the journey?"

"That depends. I am inclined to regard them in the light of a piece of corroborative evidence."

"Corroborative of what?"

"That the miscreant, whomsoever he may have

been, who wrecked the public-house up yonder, came across the water-slap to do it."

"Ha! But isn't that a good deal to hang upon the bare fact of some shreds, caught on a splinter, I suppose?"

"No, caught on a projecting nail. I don't say in itself this slight circumstance means much, but—well, there are other things to be taken into consideration. If you will turn your head, you will see that we are exactly behind the ruined house; and you may also observe that, did you wish to do so, you could, from this point, by taking advantage of the position of shrubs and bushes, very easily get over the garden fence yonder, and approach the house with little chance of being noticed. Do you see that point?"

"Quite clearly."

"Good. Then, you see, further, that it is quite impossible, all along this part of the glen, to fish the water from the other side. Therefore, the bridge to the pits being only about a quarter of a mile farther up, no human being could have any legitimate reason for scrambling across the water-slap. But supposing you wished to place dynamite immediately behind The Miner's Rest, which benevolent object you would naturally wish to carry out unobserved, it might be very easily done by skulking down through the copse towards dusk, and scrambling over the water-slap. And I will venture to affirm that the man who tried to do that, in failing light, would almost inevitably rend his garments, some way, on that inconvenient nail."

"Exactly. Your deductions are admirably logical. If you could only hit upon some recently repaired garments which these shreds exactly matched, I should say you were in possession of strong presumptive evidence that the wearer had, on some recent occasion, crossed this water-slap. But would the evidence go farther than that?"

"I think it would go far enough to justify his being called upon to give an exact account of his proceedings on the day the house was wrecked; and especially to account for his crossing by the slap instead of by the bridge. But as garments are fashioned by the score out of strong coarse tweed like this, I don't suppose we are very likely to make much of it. However, I shall keep these shreds."

He placed them carefully in his pocket-book, lighted his cigar, and smoked silently for a few moments. Then he said—

"I have been turning my attention lately to the subject of monomania. Did you ever have any experience of monomaniacs?"

"Rather. I was brought up in a lunatic asylum. I don't mean, you know, that I was a patient. But I was left an orphan very young, and my guardian was my brother-in-law, married to a sister a great deal older than myself. He was the head of a large lunatic asylum. I used to be a great deal among the patients."

"What's your idea of monomania?"

Mr. Renwick laughed. "That sounds more like the sort of question propounded in the columns of a daily paper when the silly season sets in, than

like one coming from a man supposed to regard such a subject from a scientific point of view. Moreover, what possible use can you make of my merely empirical notions on the subject? I never studied mental phenomena scientifically."

"No more did I, for the matter of that, save in a manner indirectly, as they come into connection with more absolutely physical phenomena. But, in any case, observations gathered from practical experience are always interesting, and I should like to hear your opinions."

"Well, I must admit I hold one rather strong opinion on the subject, and that is that what I should call genuine monomaniacs are more rare than they are supposed to be—that a very large proportion of those who pass for being such are shams."

"What, deliberately acting a part?" asked Dr. Munro, in some surprise.

"Not at all. But people mentally off the balance, without being genuine monomaniacs. I saw one or two of what I should call genuine instances under my brother-in-law's care, and they seemed to me so different from the majority of those classed under that head, that I worked out a theory for myself. But I don't suppose it would have much interest for you, from a scientific point of view. I imagine it is facts relating to their doings you want from me."

"No. Let me have your theories, by all means."

"Well, it has always seemed to me that people get mentally adrift mainly through living too much

in the nominative case. Did you never come across people to whom you couldn't speak of the fixed stars without their straightway finding out some connection between the fixed stars and their own interesting personality?"

Dr. Munro threw back his head with a hearty laugh. "By Jove, my dear fellow," he said, "if you deem that sort of tendency being mentally adrift, there are precious few perfectly sound minds in the world."

"No, but I don't. I only mean that that is where the tendency ends, when carried to a very exaggerated point. Then, when their balance is fairly upset, their one special craving is for the all-important I to be perpetually in evidence. For that purpose there is nothing so effectual as a mission to do something destructive to the peace and comfort of other people. It is to this class the people belong who, in England more commonly than with us, have a mission to play iconoclasts, and kick up rows during divine service about crosses and images, and all that sort of thing, and so get themselves well into public notice. You'll rarely see those sort of people have a mission to do anything likely to involve very startling consequences to themselves. They are what I call sham monomaniacs. Their real craze is self-advertisement, and they'll take up any mortal thing that'll ensure everybody talking about them, and the newspapers having paragraphs about them."

"And the genuine monomaniac?"

"Ah, he is a very different sort of being, really absorbed with his mania, and caring not one jot

for notoriety—in fact, I should say, rather avoiding it. A quiet, moody sort of fellow, and very unobtrusive. But if he does mean mischief, trust him for carrying it out with most diabolical cunning and secrecy. I have always had the idea, though I do not know if statistics would bear me out in it, that monomania of that genuine order is the result, as a general rule, of some tremendous shock or severe mental strain, overturning the balance. When I was a lad, there was a very remarkable instance under my brother-in-law's care, a man of very respectable position, and well educated. He had never been very robust, and had always possessed what his friends called 'a very curious temper.' When he was about fifteen, he saw his mother, of whom he was very fond, run over and cut to pieces by a train. His life was despaired of for some time, and when he did recover, it became gradually apparent he had developed a mania for wrecking trains. His circumstances allowed of his being carefully enough watched to prevent his succeeding. Had he been of the labouring class he would soon have got penal servitude. But he literally lived for no other object, and his cunning was so fiendish that they had at last to place him in an asylum. He was just what I describe. A quiet, unobtrusive sort of fellow, who could talk on any subject as rationally as I could do, but showing very little interest in anything going on around him, and always giving you the idea of a man brooding over something."

Dr. Munro had been meditatively stirring up the gravel at his feet with the handle of his land-

ing-net while Mr. Renwick was speaking, and once or twice he had smiled quietly to himself. "Your observations and experience harmonise wonderfully well with my theories," he said; "whether or not I may call them scientific theories. But I doubt if your classification would stand. I think your sham monomaniacs are really only those whose mania is self-advertisement."

"Perhaps. I leave scientific accuracy of deduction to you. My knowledge and classification are, of course, merely empirical. But now, having given you a valuable scientific lecture, hadn't you better turn the tables, and preach me a theological discourse on, say—original sin?"

"By all means. I should begin by remarking that it is a curious fact that while you clerics require us to accept that dogma as necessary to the salvation of our souls, the moment we take it up, merely put on it its scientific dress, and offer it back to you under the term heredity, you forthwith discover it to be a damnable heresy. No, no," he added, as his companion seemed about to speak, "I am preaching a sermon just now. Ministers claim to have it all their own way in the pulpit. They don't allow their congregations to raise objection. By Jove!"—and he sprang to his feet,— "did you see that trout rise, just over yonder, under the rowan tree? I know him well. He is a splendid fellow, and as cunning as a dozen of your monomaniacs rolled into one. Come and cast over him, and see if you cannot get the better of his cunning once for all."

Mr. Renwick rose with a laugh, and taking up his rod, proceeded to lay his fly with very creditable lightness and precision on the very spot indicated by the rippling circles spreading slowly over the pool.



CHAPTER XXI

A GLIMPSE OF THE PAST

MORE than a month had slipped away since Arthur Reid had been hurriedly summoned to his mother's side. He was still absent from Glendarff, and the moral atmosphere at Netherport manse was far from absolutely serene. Ellen Crosbie looked a trifle pale and worried. Her mother fidgeted her, and Mr. Duff was inclined to be somewhat short in the temper.

"Well, Nellie, no news yet of your young man getting home?" he said, when he came in one morning.

"Not yet."

"Why, what does the fellow mean? He's been away more than five weeks."

"He cannot help that, Mr. Duff."

"Oh, I don't know about that. Where there's a will, there's a way, you know."

"That isn't true in his case," replied the girl, firing up. "Arthur is most anxious to get home, but of course he cannot leave his mother. He told us from the very first he could not leave her again so long as she lived. And she isn't dead yet."

"That's all very well; but I should like to see a doctor's line upon it. It strikes me very forcibly he isn't in any hurry to get back, and I should like to know what it means."

"You had better go and see Mrs. Reid's doctor, then. He will tell you, fast enough, Arthur cannot possibly leave his mother."

None the less, the old man grumbled on for a time, as though Mrs. Reid's illness had been some carefully concocted plot to manifest contemptuous indifference towards his munificence, and disregard for his wishes. Then, after his departure, Ellen was lectured by her mother for having shown temper to her benefactor. And thus it began to be dimly impressed on the girl's inexperience that chains are heavy, even though they be fashioned out of gold.

Mrs. Crosbie was very irritable. The young minister, but lately the object of her most anxious maternal solicitude, was fast sliding downwards to the status of a detrimental in her estimation. She had made Mr. Renwick's acquaintance, and found him as charming as she had found Mr. Reid before he had become associated in her mind with vexatious occurrences. She had ascertained, also, that Mr. Renwick had expectations, and was an Indian missionary only from a desire of gaining experience and wider knowledge of the world, not from any design of permanent expatriation. He had wealthy connections, and was likely in time to succeed to considerable property himself. Then, also, he was a total abstainer, and might therefore be confidently expected to hold those

really moderate and sensible views on the subject which prevailed at Netherport manse. But for this unlucky engagement, she caught herself thinking, what might not have resulted from his accidental advent to the neighbourhood of Netherport? Clearly it was a case of breakers ahead for Arthur Reid, whenever he did return to Glendarff.

But only a few days after Mr. Duff's visit Ellen was radiant, although she tried hard to subdue her manner to a becomingly sympathetic tinge. A letter from Arthur brought her the news that Mrs. Reid was sinking rapidly. A few hours must see the end, and she might count on his being back in Glendarff very shortly.

He came ere long with a lightened, though a saddened heart. The weariness and pain of the last few weeks, and the impossibility of any improvement, forbade him to feel anything but thankfulness that at last his suffering mother was at rest; and the peculiar difficulties of his own position were greatly decreased. If he now asked his intended wife to make some sacrifices for his sake, he had at least something to offer in return. Ever since the date of his conversation with Mrs. Baird, he had grasped the situation very comprehensively. The tug of war between the old distiller and himself was impending. Which would win? He had strong faith in his promised bride, but weight told heavily in such a contest, and gold was very heavy. His chances would certainly not be decreased by his being in a position to make settlements himself.

His reception at Netherport manse did not inspire him with those feelings of confidence which are in themselves a presage of victory. Ellen was very loving, but she seemed nervous, and there was a shade of embarrassment in her manner. Mrs. Crosbie's inquiries about his mother, and condolences, seemed to lack the spontaneity of genuine expressions of feeling. Dr. Crosbie was more thoroughly like himself than any other member of the family, and it was almost a relief to Arthur Reid when he retired with him, after luncheon, to his study, for a discussion on matters of business.

"I am really exceedingly glad to see you back again at last, my dear Reid," Dr. Crosbie said, "and able to come to some settlement about our affairs. Things have not been very pleasant for us here lately, I can assure you."

"Indeed?" said his intended son-in-law, in some surprise. "How is that?"

"Well, our good friend Mr. Duff took it into his head to be—well, a little petulant about the delay occasioned by your absence."

If Dr. Crosbie had been a quick observer, he would have noticed a little setting of the younger man's firmly-cut mouth, as he replied—

"I don't see what business that is of his."

"My dear Reid! You surely are aware his offer was made with a special design of preventing the necessity of a long engagement?"

"Certainly. But that does not give him any right to dictate to me. It is to you alone, Dr.

Crosbie, I am accountable for any action of mine in this matter," said Mr. Reid.

He had no intention of handing in his ultimatum until he was in a position to append his own offers ; but he had not the slightest intention, meantime, of having Mr. Duff thrust into the matter, so far as his share in it was concerned.

"Oh, of course, certainly," replied the Doctor, who was clearly quite as determined to drag Mr. Duff in as the other was to thrust him out. "But, you know, an old man like Duff, accustomed to have everything his own way, and living always surrounded with servants, who have nothing to do but attend to every whim, is apt to grow a little imperious, and inclined to think the very course of nature should change, if it happens to suit him that it should do so."

"It will be an excellent lesson, then, for him to find out he cannot always have his own way."

"Oh, it will be all right now. I would suggest a day being fixed when he might join us here, and we could discuss all the arrangements."

"I shall be quite ready to discuss everything with you, Dr. Crosbie, when I am in a position to do so. But that will not be for a short time yet," replied Arthur Reid, altogether ignoring Mr. Duff.

"My dear Reid ! What, further delays ?"

"Certainly. You must remember my position is a good deal changed by the death of my mother. I am not now a rich man, still it is in my power to make a settlement upon your daughter."

be deeply interested in hearing anything you know about the fellow. He has always suspected him of being a monomaniac."

"Oh, he has, has he?" exclaimed Mr. Renwick, stopping dead, as sundry disconnected remembrances lying loose about in his mind suddenly wove themselves into a connected thread of circumstances. "I wish I had known that when the fellow passed. I would have studied his trousers attentively."

"What in the world do you mean?"

Mr. Renwick laughed heartily at his companion's perplexed expression. "Don't be afraid. I am not a monomaniac, finding the ultimate solution of all things in trousers. Dr. Munro shall tell you himself what I mean."

The minister found the contented hawing of his elders, and the struggles of the session-clerk with the minute-book, more than usually wearisome that night; and it is to be feared his own conduct was scarcely becoming in a minister, for more than once, when some solemnly futile trifle was being earnestly discussed, he was aroused by some direct appeal about—alas! he knew not what—from puzzled speculation as to what could possibly have induced Dr. Munro to say anything to Mr. Renwick about Millroy's torn trousers.

At last, however, the session came to an end; and the minister, hurrying home, found Mr. Renwick and Dr. Munro awaiting him. All preliminaries were speedily arranged, and two very eager listeners were awaiting the longed-for revelations.

"I have the whole story pretty clear now," Mr. Renwick said. "One circumstance soon recalled another, when once I began to think over it all. Your man's name is Edward Lane. His father was hung in Edinburgh about eight years since, more or less, for murdering his wife— Hulloo!"

The interjection was occasioned by the strange behaviour of Dr. Munro. He started up from his seat with a sudden and incoherent ejaculation.

"What! The son of the man Lane, who murdered his wife in a public-house kept by a man named Peter Kelly?"

"The same."

Arthur Reid and Dr. Munro looked at one another for a moment in silence. For them, as for Mr. Renwick earlier in the day, but with far more startling effect, isolated facts were rapidly weaving themselves into a connected thread. After a moment's silence, Dr. Munro resumed his seat, saying—

"Well, let us hear your story, Renwick. I think we can promise you a sequel as interesting as anything you can possibly tell us."

"I see you already know something of the case."

"Yes. It happened in my student days, and an accident had occasioned my going to Kelly's house a short time before the murder was committed. I remember seeing the man Lane."

"It was a miserable business. I was an assistant at the time in Edinburgh, and chanced to be taking his prison duty for a friend on the sick list. I saw

Lane many times both before and after his trial. A strong effort was made to get his sentence commuted, so all his past circumstances were carefully searched out. It was as sad a story as I ever heard. If ever there was a case in which sound law was infamous injustice, it was that one. The man who ought to have been hung for that murder was Kelly, the landlord of the house in which it happened—I beg your pardon!"

"The avenger of blood," Arthur Reid has murmured below his breath to Dr. Munro. "Nay, I beg yours for the interruption," he added aloud. "I will explain later. Pray go on."

"Lane, it appeared, had been foreman at a cabinetmaker's; and until some three or four years before the murder, he and his wife had been as bright and happy a couple, with as comfortable a little home as you could picture to yourself. But they belonged to that volatile class, sadly deficient in ballast, whose course in life mainly depends on the circumstances into which they are thrown. Lane was one of those superficially sharp, clever fellows who can do almost anything, and pick up a sort of show of any accomplishment almost at a moment's notice. He had a very fine voice. He and his wife were both lively, and fond of gadding about. With good wages, and only one child, there was probably more money to spend in pleasure-seeking than was good for them. They were constant visitors to theatres and music halls, and he caught up a style of singing which told wonderfully with a certain class. He knew all the music-hall comic songs and jokes, and he was a

good billiard and card player, too. How Kelly first became acquainted with him I do not know; but the scoundrel soon saw what a prize he had lighted upon, to draw visitors to a house like his, and keep them amused, and so giving orders freely. He threw out every lure he could to catch Lane; free passes for all sorts of places of amusement; drink to any extent; incessant flattery. So the process of dragging down went merrily on, and by degrees Lane got heavily into Kelly's debt. Just about that time Mrs. Kelly died, and then Kelly offered to remit the larger part of Lane's debt, and pay him a good salary, if he would come and be his assistant; Mrs. Lane to act as housekeeper. She was much against the plan, poor soul! but resistance was useless. Kelly let it be distinctly understood he would put on the screw if they did not accept his terms. That move sealed their fate. It was a villainous house, and they lived in a moral atmosphere reeking with pollution. She soon took to drinking as well as her husband; and cheerfulness, affection, and good temper were exchanged for quarrelling, cursing, and misery. I think they had been with Kelly for nearly two years when the murder took place. They had been quarrelling furiously for some time, and people who were about the place told me the language that once bright and thoroughly respectable woman could use was enough to make your blood run cold. There was no question the murder was premeditated, although he had formerly been the kindest and most affectionate of husbands; so all attempts to get him off failed. I had many conversations

with him, and I feel certain I grasped what he had done. He had been so fatally injured by the vile poison Kelly sold, and was responsible for his own death several times. He was then eighteen. He seemed like a boy told he had been very foolish. He wanted to get hold of money rather suddenly, and I had been abroad. I recognised him."

"Do you think he was a fool?" Munro asked.

"Most improbable, I think. In his dazed condition he was not a fool."

"What a ghastly story! He had grown rather pale and tremulous. Dr. Munro said he supposed he was a victim of the developments of the day, doing nothing of the kind. Ellen Crosbie's ten years' experience of the fact that Mr. Duff had been of the fatal house."

"Now for the sequel," he said; and he briefly told the story of the murder, of the wreck, of the torn trousers.

"I took a note, of course. Millroy was wearing a suit that matched exactly, and

patch on them. An uncommon of your monomaniac, Renwick added.

"With a difference. This a more logical sort of man-train-wrecking acquaintance. smashing hammers whenever because his father killed his hammer. He goes straight for all the mischief—the man who stuff which brought about all

"Oh, well, you needn't speak logical faculties of monomaniac Reid. "We have before us this. What is to be done? We are of the lovely cruxes of our. This man having been goaded a Caligula might have rejoiced the madness of seeking to avoid we, as good citizens, ought to civil power, to be strung up, the oppressed not to meddle doers whom the law takes protection."

Mr. Renwick glanced for a moment at the young man's burning eyes and curling lip of indignation. It was a fine, fiery young spirit and straining at the leash in indignation. But it would be training and experience ere estimate the value of steady, the great struggle with evil.

"You are a trifle hyperbolic."

said. "If this sort of 'wild justice' were not kept steadily in check, you would soon find it would grow a crop of evil results to which those you deplore would be a trifle. As it is, is it not rather hard on this man Duncan, who seems a fairly respectable sort of fellow, that he should suffer ruinous loss, and receive injuries which, if not fatal, must tell on him for life, because a man with whom he had no connection did another a grievous wrong many years ago? But what could this fellow mean by going to Mr. Duff about the house?"

"A blind to avert suspicion from himself," said Dr. Munro.

"I don't know. I think there must be something more in it than that."

"Still the question remains unanswered. What are we to do?" said Arthur Reid.

"There is nothing we can do," replied Dr. Munro, "simply because doing anything means putting a rope round Millroy's neck; and though I am not quite so heroic in my theories as you are, Reid, I would go a long way to shield the son of Robert Lane from any penalties for murdering Peter Kelly. We can't betray either his doings or his identity."

"No. But my heroic theories, as you call them, don't extend the length of leaving him free to indulge his revengeful propensities unmolested."

"I think there is a *via media*. He is not likely to attempt anything more in Glendarff. We must watch him to the best of our ability, and if he goes

wandering away to other places,
steps may be necessary."

"Yes," Mr. Renwick said, "
your only course. All the same
you your responsibilities. I am
neither minister nor doctor in Gl

CHAPTER XXII

AN ULTIMATUM

THE absolute not being subject to degrees, it may not be said that Mr. Renwick's revelations, bringing into a prominence, all unsuspected by himself, the workings of the eternal law that, sooner or later, sin, by its own natural course, shall work out its own retribution, and casting a lurid light upon the methods by which, in part at least, Mr. Duff's fortune had been amassed, had strengthened the minister's already firmly-settled purpose to accept no share of the wages of unrighteousness. But when, only a few days after the departure of his guest, he received, sooner than he had anticipated, such financial statements from his lawyer as enabled him clearly to explain what his future position would be, the recollection of all he had heard ensured his going to Netherport manse in a stern, unflinching mood calculated to give his explanations a semblance of more irrevocable fixity of purpose. His anticipations were not very cheering. A chill shadow, as of impending separation, seemed to be already creeping over him. Every visit he had paid to his intended bride, since his return home, had increased the forebodings

which had oppressed him ever since his conversation with Mrs. Baird, as to the extent of the influence Dr. and Mrs. Crosbie were likely to exercise upon their daughter. Their whole weight would be thrown into the scale against him, and what would be the effect on Ellen herself? She was a loving, true-hearted girl, who, if left to herself, would, he honestly believed, have been well content to accept his judgment. But the moral atmosphere around her was that of the stage of spiritual development which found a heinous offence in drinking even a glass of sherry, but perfectly justifiable action in something not very far short of an effort to secure a share in the profits of production of that unclean thing, denounced as destructive, in any form or shape, for both soul and body. Could she be expected to grasp his broader and loftier view of the question all in a moment, just when her young eyes were dazzled by the prospect of becoming an heiress, and with all her parents' influence working strongly against him? His uncertainty on this point roused a further doubt in his mind. Should his first step be to explain his views and sentiments to Ellen herself, or should he lay them before her parents? The first presentment of the matter might probably strongly influence the result in the case of a young and inexperienced girl; but, at the same time, that very fact of her youth and inexperience seemed to render a first reference to her parents the more honourable course. Somewhat sadly, too, the question arose in his mind whether, if a marriage with him was to be the cause of any rupture with

her parents, it would not be better for her the engagement should be broken off.

The final result of his meditations was a note begging for an interview with Dr. Crosbie on a certain day. The heads of the house stiffened themselves up in an attitude of armed neutrality, a distinct tendency towards the hostile side thereof being manifest in a prompt suggestion from Mrs. Crosbie that it would be well Ellen should be got out of the way on the occasion. Dr. Crosbie, however, demurred.

"I think that would be rather a strong measure. The date of his visit being fixed beforehand, he could hardly fail to feel it had been done designedly."

"It can be arranged quite easily," Mrs. Crosbie replied. "Your interview will be over before our dinner-hour, for which, if I send her out, Ellen will be returning. If things go more pleasantly than I expect they will, he can be asked to stay and lunch with us. If it seems better they should not meet, he can be allowed to depart uninvited."

To this astute proposition Dr. Crosbie cordially assented; and he received his erst intended, now only possible son-in-law, with his usual suavity. Ponderous people have one great advantage when circumstances are precarious. The enormous force of leverage required to lift them out of their groove ensures to them a certain monotony of deportment, rendering it extremely difficult, on any special occasion, to draw trustworthy deductions from their demeanour as to their feelings or opinions. Had the younger minister's visit been merely on

some trifling Presbyterial business, his senior could not have received him with more impenetrable serenity of countenance.

"I am very glad," Arthur Reid said, after a few trifling preliminary remarks, "to be able, sooner than I had hoped, to give you"—he pulled himself up short. Throughout all his walk into Netherport he had been thinking about old Duff, Kelly, and the Lanes, and he felt so coldly stern he was on the point of running on into—"my ultimatum." Just in time he managed to check the imperious phrase, and turn it into the rather weak substitute—"a sketch of my position and prospects."

"I am very pleased to hear it," Dr. Crosbie said. "I am sure it will be very satisfactory all round that the matter should be definitely settled. The delay, though of course, under the sad circumstances, quite unavoidable, has been somewhat harassing."

"Yes, it has been unfortunate. However, you will see by these memoranda, which I will leave with you, to look over at your leisure, that I am now in a position to settle not much less than three thousand pounds on Ellen."

"A very nice little sum indeed," said Dr. Crosbie, with urbanity. "I should have thought myself a very lucky fellow at your age, if I could have settled as much on my intended wife."

"I only wish it was more. However, I hope it does not represent all that I may be able to do. The heavy expenses of my mother's invalid condition, of course, rendered her small income quite insufficient, and were a heavy charge on my re-

sources. Freed from that responsibility, I feel confident my professional income will enable me to provide for Ellen just such a home as she leaves to come to me. I therefore calculate on being able, for a long time to come, to add the income arising from this capital sum to the principal. If, therefore, my life is only spared for a few years, I trust the amount at Ellen's disposal will be considerably increased."

"Really, hardly a necessity, my dear Reid, considering the amount of the fortune my daughter will bring with her. Indeed, I must say the position seems in all respects most satisfactory. A husband who is all we could wish ; a charming home within easy reach of her own family ; a comfortable income ; and certain provision for future contingencies. What more could the most exacting of parents require ?"

The younger man drew a deep breath. The crucial moment was come. He must resolutely demolish this glowing vision, by substitution of the moderate, but still not despicable reality, on which he was determined to take his stand.

"I have not quite ended what I have to say," he replied, "and I fear I have reached a point at which I cannot quite so confidently anticipate carrying you with me."

"Indeed ?" And pikes and bayonets bristled in a moment over the ramparts of Dr. Crosbie's soul.

"Yes, unfortunately. You are, I am sure, aware that from the time of my first coming to this neighbourhood I have openly expressed my

opinion that large fortunes, acquired by the manufacture of intoxicating drinks, are open to very grave impeachment."

"Yes, I am quite aware you hold what you must forgive a much older and more experienced man than yourself for terming rather quixotic ideas on the subject—ideas which, also, I must allow, seem rather inconsistent with the fact that you are not yourself a total abstainer."

Arthur Reid smiled quietly. "Do you want me to balance one inconsistency with another," he asked, "and having expressed a decided opinion on the subject, show that I am ready promptly to waive the objection, whenever I am likely to reap any personal advantage from a fortune so acquired?"

"As I have already remarked," replied Dr. Crosbie majestically, "the offer is made to my daughter, not to you."

"True. But how can our interests be separated? How can I fail to reap personal advantage from a fortune belonging to my wife? Neither is my chief objection to Mr. Duff an objection to his distillery. It is as owner of houses licensed for the sale of intoxicating drinks I object far more strongly to him and his wealth."

"Ah! Mrs. Crosbie told me what you had said to her. I can only join her in saying I do not in the least believe that report to be well-founded."

"Have you sought the confirmation I suggested?"

"Certainly not."

"Then your belief is a mere matter of personal

feeling. There is plenty of evidence, if you choose to seek it. As far as the question of inconsistency in my present attitude is concerned, perhaps my judgment is warped by my excessive dislike to drinking cold water, but I really cannot see the inconsistency. I do not condemn alcohol, used in moderation, as an absolutely injurious thing. On the contrary, I believe in its beneficial properties. But I do believe that large fortunes acquired by the traffic in it are the result of excessive, not of moderate use, and in view of the ghastly results of such success I should hold it, in myself, a crime to participate, either directly or indirectly, in any part of such a fortune."

"Am I to understand, then," asked Dr. Crosbie stiffly, "that you would deem my daughter's acceptance of Mr. Duff's munificent offer a reason for breaking off your engagement?"

Arthur Reid's lips had parted for the utterance of the fateful affirmative, when his reply was unexpectedly checked. The door opened abruptly, and no less a person than Mr. Duff himself entered unceremoniously. The clank of chains was very audible to the spiritual ear. His manner, at once arrogant and insolently familiar, proclaimed at once the thoroughly vulgar man, conscious of having conferred a heavy obligation, and holding himself, in consequence, free to trample under his feet the ordinary courtesies of life. Dr. Crosbie coloured slightly.

"Oh ho!" said the old man, "just what I thought. Sloan told me he had seen our young laggard here prancing along very friskily, a little while since, in

this direction, so I just came to see what was going on. I think, considering how much I have to say in this business, I might have been summoned to the conference."

Arthur Reid looked at Dr. Crosbie, read his annoyance in his flushed face and uneasy movements, and, touched with commiseration for his undignified position, promptly took his own resolution.

"I believe, Mr. Duff," he said, "it had been Dr. Crosbie's intention to invite you to be present at our meeting to-day. But he yielded to my wish that my interview should be with himself alone, leaving him to communicate to you afterwards whatever he deemed necessary."

"Not if I know it, young man. There's nothing I like better than a little sparring with you. Old people are apt to feel a little flat in the morning, and a round or so with you pegs me up for the whole day. So here I am. And now, let's hear how the case stands."

Again the younger minister looked at his elder brother, and, still dominated by compassion, said—

"Perhaps, Dr. Crosbie, as Mr. Duff has so unexpectedly joined us, I had better at once explain"—

"I think so," was all the abashed host could say.

"Well, then, Mr. Duff, I may tell you my principal errand to-day was to explain to Dr. Crosbie the amount of settlement the death of my mother would enable me to make upon his daughter."

"All right. Let's hear what pauper's portion you are going to settle on my little girl."

Arthur Reid bit his lip, but still compassion for the man forced to submit to such humiliation enabled him to keep down his wrath. Truly, in his own case, virtue had been its own reward. This was the man who, had he faltered in loyalty to his own principles, would have had the right of a munificent benefactor to lord it over him in his own house, as he was now insolently lording it over the man who had walked into his snare.

"It is quite needless to go into that question, Mr. Duff," he coldly answered. "When your entrance interrupted our conversation, I was on the point of telling Dr. Crosbie my marriage with his daughter must be contingent on a refusal of the offer you have made. You have therefore no further right to inquire into my affairs."

For a moment the old man was silent, as though somewhat rebuffed by the reply, as, in truth, he was tolerably safe to be. His associations through life were little likely to have been such as to induce belief that any man would stand by his own principles to the idiotical extreme of refusing a substantial fortune rather than be false to them. But he gallantly rallied his very remarkable capacity for being offensive.

"Very mighty, and independent, and uncommon pious we are! I wonder we can stand being contaminated by the presence of an old sinner that made his money, in the drink trade, perhaps, but, let me tell you, by as good use of his brains as ever you made of yours, and by much harder work than

ever those fine lady-hands of yours got through. But, as we have got so far, I'd like to know what you've got to allege against my money, that you should sniff at it, as if it was a bit of carrion? One would think, to hear you talk, I was a thief, or a forger of base coin."

"I see no necessity for prolonging the discussion, Mr. Duff. I do not claim for myself any right to intrude my opinions on you, any more than I admit your right to inquire into my private affairs."

"No, you don't slip off that way. I wish to know what you have to say."

"You know that well enough already. I have told you very plainly what my objection is to fortunes made as yours has been."

"Which is just about as reasonable a one as to fall foul of people for making poisons, because some fools go and commit suicide with them. Oh, I haven't forgot that old sermon of yours, about my brother's keeper. But that's all rot, as far as I'm concerned. There might be something in it if I went and got some drunken fool into my house, and coaxed him to go on drinking till he killed himself; but in business it's everyone for himself, and them as can't take care of themselves must just chance it. Why don't you set up your pious back at them that makes laudanum?"

"They do not go about urging people to buy and use their laudanum to a poisonous extent."

"And who says I do anything like that? Are you such a flat as to suppose people come running to a distillery with coppers and sixpences, to buy

small drinks of whisky? When whisky's going out from my place by the hogshead, how am I to know where the stuff is going? Perhaps some of it might be bottled off for that cellar of yours I offered to stock for you."

"Waiving that question for a moment, Mr. Duff, what of your public-houses?"

"There you are again! Picking up a lot of gossip and going on as if you'd proved the truth of it. What right have you to say I ever owned a public-house in my life?"

The young minister fixed his keen, searching glance on the old man, and spoke, sternly enough. "Look me in the face, sir, and here, before Dr. Crosbie, a minister like myself, dare to deny you were owner of The Rock, in Caledonia Street, Edinburgh, worked by Peter Kelly, and closed some eight years since, chiefly in consequence of facts which came to light when Robert Lane was tried and sentenced to death for murdering his wife in that very house."

Dr. Crosbie uttered an involuntary exclamation of horror. The old distiller perceptibly winced; his colour changed, and his shifty eyes sank for a moment. Then gathering himself up, he boldly returned the steady, piercing glance fixed upon him, and coolly replied—

"I utterly deny it!"

Dr. Crosbie gave a gasp of relief. Arthur Reid made an expressive gesture, and answered in a tone of cutting contempt—

"There is nothing more to be said, then."

"Yes, but there is a good deal more to be said.

I ain't going to stand any more of these jackanape airs, I can tell you. Look you here," and he turned to Dr. Crosbie, "I made your daughter an uncommon handsome offer. I take it there ain't many girls with as good a chance of having to earn their own bread ever got an offer of ten thousand pounds so easy, and I don't like the way I've been treated."

"Really, Mr. Duff," stammered Dr. Crosbie, "I—I don't think you can accuse us of having shown ourselves insensible to your kindness to our child."

"Well, I don't know. There seems to me to have been a deal of shilly-shallying. People don't generally have to think and consider so much before they agree to accept ten thousand pounds. But maybe it ain't your fault. I've a notion I'm going to fit the saddle on the right horse; and now, I tell you, if Ellen does marry this uncommon pious minister, she'll never see the colour of a sovereign of mine. If she marries anyone else, I'm good for the money, and all the furniture besides."

With that he flung out of the room, where for a moment there was dead silence. But Dr. Crosbie recovered himself with marvellous rapidity. The path was clear now, with a vengeance, and he rose to the situation with amazing readiness of resource.

"This has been most unfortunate, Mr. Reid," he said, with an air of studied coldness.

"Not to me, Dr. Crosbie. Mr. Duff's unexpected entrance interrupted me at the point of

telling you I could have nothing to do with his money."

"Oh, I did not mean that. I mean it is most unfortunate you should have rashly committed yourself to an entirely false accusation, of such a damaging character, against him."

"My dear sir, I made no false accusation against the man. It would be perfectly easy to secure demonstrative evidence of his proprietorship of that house. Only the fact of his subordinate Kelly being dead emboldens him to deny it. If ever man told you a barefaced falsehood, Mr. Duff did when he denied being the proprietor of that house."

"Oh no, no, my dear Mr. Reid, you are really going too far! As I have always allowed, there is much about Mr. Duff I deplore. Still, he has always been treated as a friend in my house. I cannot allow such aspersions on him here."

"Well, we need not discuss him further. Some day you will know what he really is far better than you do now, and I feel very sure that you will then cordially approve my attitude towards him. Meantime, may we not finish our interrupted discussion? You know now what my answer would have been to your question, had not Mr. Duff's unexpected entrance prevented my giving it. And he has rendered all further consideration of that point needless. I have therefore only to ask you whether there are any special conditions you wish inserted in the settlements which I will at once instruct my lawyer to draft for your approval?"

He asked the question with outward gravity, but

him further? He has removed himself from the range of our purposes."

"I cannot quite feel with you. His intentions towards my child are still most liberal, under certain conditions."

"Namely, that she renounces the man she loves, and who loves her. Is this question merely one of money with you, Dr. Crosbie? Have Ellen's wishes and feelings no place in your considerations?"

Dr. Crosbie flushed up again. "The question has to be duly considered from all points," he said. "In fact, Mr. Reid, the position is this. I have been, all this time, considering the question of my daughter's immediate marriage with you from the point of her coming to you with a sufficient fortune of her own to render her practically independent of all those future chances and accidents which a father is bound to take into account, as at least possibilities. Now, I find the marriage would actually cost her her fortune, and being, unhappily, not a man of property myself, I feel bound to take time to consider the proposals with which you are able to replace this very serious loss to her. The question is one I feel ought not to be summarily settled, without her mother being consulted, and Ellen herself having time to reflect, after the position has been fully explained to her. In fact, I think you cannot hold me unreasonable if I say there must be a little family council over this important decision."

A weighing, in fact, of himself and his proposed settlement in one scale, against ten thousand pounds and a houseful of furniture in the other,

the balance being adjusted by Mrs. Crosbie. "It must be as you please," he said.

"Then you will not, I hope, think me discourteous if I ask you to make it convenient to come to us again to-morrow afternoon, say about four o'clock, when I hope everything may be satisfactorily settled for the happiness and welfare of all concerned."

CHAPTER XXIII

FURTHER DISCLOSURES

So Arthur Reid was not on that occasion invited to lunch at Netherport Manse. He was sped on his homeward way with a diplomatic phrase of studied ambiguity, and cherishing sentiments of a very carnal nature against the old distiller, with whom all the presage of victory lay; for in that impending family council he was very well aware in which scale Dr. and Mrs. Crosbie would sit. Love had not so bemused his judgment that he credited Ellen Crosbie with the force of character needed to bring her safe through such an ordeal. And, after all, she was barely one-and-twenty, had always lived in a secluded circle, and had from infancy imbibed the teaching of that narrow school which, if it does not avowedly proclaim a divorce between positive religious sentiment and the noblest qualities with which nature can endow human beings, takes little account of the qualities, if only the sentiments be sedulously cultivated. It was little to be expected she could rise superior to the influences of her whole life when parental weight was thrown into the scale of self-interested worldliness. Some doubts even flitted through

his mind whether he would see her again. He was very certain his interview on the morrow would be with Mrs. Crosbie. The affair had reached just that stage at which men are wont to be seized with an admiration, not otherwise invariably apparent, for the superior tact and adroitness of women in manipulating difficult situations with delicacy and precision, and to leave the settlement of matters in their hands.

His housekeeper came to meet him, when she heard him enter the manse. "Millroy was seekin' ye, sir," she said. "At least, he called in the dinner-hour to say he wad be glad o' speech wi' ye; an' wad ye send word what evenin' ye wad wish him to call?"

"Send the boy this evening, then," he replied, "to tell him I am uncertain about my engagements to-morrow, but that on the following evening I shall be sure to be at home." He had a shrewd suspicion he might very possibly totally forget all about the matter did he not settle it at once.

As he had fully anticipated, it was by Mrs. Crosbie herself he was received the following afternoon in the drawing-room at Netherport Manse. She strove to assume a demeanour of rather elaborate courtesy, but it was a flimsy enough garment to allow the bristles of underlying hostility to protrude through it unmistakably.

"My dear *Mr. Reid*," she said, "I am quite ashamed you should be asked to call in this way, almost as if you were a servant seeking a situation. Of course, it would be more fitting Dr. Crosbie should have called on you. But, as you know, the

climb over the hill is a little too much for him. And it is such a long way round."

"I am very glad Dr. Crosbie did not think it necessary to undertake such a fatiguing expedition."

"Thanks. It is very kind of you to say so. We are so very, *very* sorry for the turn matters have taken. We had hoped everything would be so different. But, indeed, you must forgive my saying it is entirely your own fault."

"What is entirely my own fault?"

"This sudden alteration in all Mr. Duff's feelings."

"Do you believe they have changed?"

"My dear Mr. Reid, what a strange question, when from making a really splendid offer to facilitate your marriage with Ellen, he now makes his proposed gift conditional on her not marrying you! I admit I am more grieved than surprised. I have always so much regretted your open expressions of opinions which to older and more experienced people, like ourselves, are evidently overstrained, and not altogether consistent with Christian charity. And when you allowed your—forgive my calling them so—prejudices to carry you the length of letting him understand you would rather break off your engagement than be in any way indebted to him, we cannot wonder at his feeling very much incensed. It does not look as if your love for our child is very strong."

Truly she had come well primed from the family council! He began to feel rather weary of this "damnable iteration."

assure you. But I am glad to say her sense of duty guides her steadily. She feels that it is her duty to be guided by her parents' wishes."

The young minister had grown very pale ; but his spirit was thoroughly roused. "I hope, then, I may be allowed to say good-bye to her in person?" he said composedly.

"That is what she herself wishes. I admit both her father and I are of opinion an interview can only be painful to both. But we have yielded to her entreaty. I will send her to you."

She left the room as she spoke, and after a brief interval, Ellen herself entered. Her face was pale, her eyelids suspiciously swollen, and her manner nervous and embarrassed. The stern expression on her lover's face melted into softness at the sight of her. He stepped forward to meet her, folded her in his arms, and said, looking down sadly into her eyes—

"So Mr. Duff has conquered, Nellie, and his accursed gold has parted you and me!"

She began to sob. "Oh, Arthur, how can you say that? You know it is all your own doing, angering him that way. He offered the money, at first, just that we might be able to marry at once."

"He had never any such design, dear. Animosity towards me was the chief motive of his action throughout. He knew perfectly well I would never consent to receive a penny of his money; and he knew equally well what your parents would do if I refused."

"And why should you refuse, Arthur? Papa and

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"Well, we might seem to give it up, mightn't we, and be secretly engaged all the same? Mr. Duff is past seventy now. If he was dead, and out of the way, you wouldn't mind having the money, would you?"

She did not see how he winced. To such a state of mental and moral confusion how could his action appear otherwise than strained to the point of absurdity?

"I cannot hear of anything of that sort, dear. I cannot let you entangle yourself in any clandestine proceedings. And neither now, nor ever, will I touch a single penny of Mr. Duff's money."

She began to sob again. "Then there is no use talking any more, Arthur. Papa and mamma will never let me marry you."

His reply was prevented by the entrance of Mrs. Crosbie, so opportunely that an uncharitable suspicion crossed his mind of her having kept herself in a position to intervene at any desirable moment.

"Nellie, my dear child," she said, "compose yourself; and rest assured you will never regret having allowed your parents to guide you in such an important decision as this one. My dear Mr. Reid, I am sure you will feel, with me, it is best this interview should now terminate. And, believe me, though we must think above all things of what is best for our child's interests, both Dr. Crosbie and myself deeply regret the result of your conscientious, but, as you know we think, overstrained sensitiveness. We shall always look upon you as a valued and respected friend."

Defeat, so far, was his fate. He could carry his own banner untarnished out of the fight ; but he could not carry with it the prize for which he had fought. His spirit rose, however, to the occasion, and he bade farewell to his all too pliant lady-love with chivalrous tenderness, saluting her mother, in parting, with distant courtesy. So that episode in his life's story was over, and his heart was very sad, but by no means broken. Perchance a certain unministerial vindictiveness towards the old man who had dealt him this telling blow helped to cauterise his wounds. One consolatory recollection, at least, was even then in his mind. He need no longer chafe in a condition of half occupation which was, to his eager spirit, irksome idleness. Whosoever could find in the fairly good stipend and excellent manse of Glendarff a providential call to do uncommonly little work, might have the living. He, with the instincts of a true soldier, pined for the camp and the battlefield, not for the indolent ease of garrison duty. And now he would away at once to the inspiring trumpet calls and battle-din of active service.

But this brief drama of love had a short and bitter epilogue yet to come. He was slowly climbing the hill, sunk in a deep reverie, when just as he reached a footgate leading on to the path from the Craigmores grounds, it opened, and Mr. Duff emerged from the shrubbery in which it was embedded. At the sight of him every trace of sadness vanished from Arthur Reid's face and manner. The old distiller might know he had triumphed, but he should never read the signs of

his triumph in the demeanour of his vanquished foe. He nerved himself to fight, without allowing one wince or tremor to betray that it was a sorely wounded man who fought. If any further stimulus had been needed, he would have found it in the wicked gleam in the old man's eyes.

"So, young man," he said, "you've got your dismissal down yonder?"

"By no means."

"Eh? How?" He was evidently startled.

"It is merely a case of being unable to come to an agreement. The terms I offer are not approved. I do not choose to accept the alternative terms offered to me. That constitutes breaking off of negotiations, not dismissal."

"Oh, bother your fine long words! It comes to much the same thing in the end, I take it."

"Just what I should expect you to imagine. Had you spent a little more of the time you have wasted in heaping up riches, in educating yourself, you would understand the meaning of words better."

Mr. Duff was rather taken aback. He had calculated on finding his antagonist with, as he phrased it, all the fight taken out of him, and he did not relish this sharp fencing with weapons in the use of which he had little skill. "Hang your impudence!" he said in a surly tone. "Haven't my riches been of use to me? Haven't they enabled me to pay you smartly for your confounded airs? Haven't I diddled you out of your lady-love, and without actually spending a sixpence, either? You may fence as you please, but I've smitten you hip and thigh this time."



"It's no' just exactly as a minister I want to speak to ye, sir. But I ken ye're a gentleman that a puir man can trust, an' I want ye to gie me a helpin' han' about a matter that's o' some consequence to me."

"Willingly, if it is anything I can do," replied the minister, with a good many mental reservations as to what he could and would do for such a doubtful suppliant, and finding cause for comment in his speech as well as his demeanour. There was much less difficulty in finding words than was usual with him.

Millroy did not answer for a moment. Then, looking Mr. Reid more fully in the face than he had ever done before, he asked—

"What wad Mr. Renwick be tellin' ye about me, sir?"

The minister's thoughts were turned now, to some purpose. He felt himself suddenly plunging at headlong speed into the absolutely unknown, and he glanced with momentary suspicion at the leather bag.

"Millroy, what have you got in that bag?" was his rather irrelevant answer.

A curious smile passed over the man's face. He instantly opened the bag, showing its contents to be old letters and papers.

"Good," said the minister. "Now I will answer your question. Mr. Renwick told me your history, so far as it was known to himself. Edward Lane, from my very soul I can say I never felt so deep a sympathy with any living being."

A scowl darkened the man's face. "Ye're vera

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bright an' merry, she was mair like an elder sister than a mither. A bonnie wee hame we had, wi' a' things nice about it. When I cam' hame frae the schule, I maistly went roun' by my faither's place, an' walkit hame wi' him; an' then we'd aye find the house sae clean an' bright, an' tea set out sae trim an' nice, an' my mither as blythe as a lassie. Then, maist nights, we were aff to somethin', a concert, or the theatre, or somethin'. I'll no' say but there was ower much o' that. But my faither likit it, an' was that fond o' my mither, he wadna be content unless she was aye wi' him. I dinna think there was ever a pay-night, when there was somethin' extra for overtime, but he brought her some wee present he thought she'd like. I canna deny that whiles he took ower much drink, but it wasna often, an' it didna mak' him thrawn, for he aye went to decent places, an' got wholesome stuff, nae yon poison that sets men mad. How he first fell in wi' yon hell-hound I sent to his ain hame, I dinna ken. An' bein' but a laddie, I doubt things had been gettin' a bit wrang before I kent aught o't. But weel I mind the first hint I got o' ony-thing bein' amiss, for it was the first time I ever saw my mither greet. I was comin' hame wi' my faither ae night, when we met Kelly, an' he wad hae him to gang somewhere wi' him; sae my faither sent me hame, to tell my mither he was awa' wi' Mr. Kelly, an' wad likely no' be hame till late. My mither was sair pit about, an' she began to greet, an' tauld me she didna like Kelly, an' it grieved her my faither was sae much about wi' him. After that, I soon began to see things werena gaein' as

they should do. My faither was aftener out alane, an' nae hame, whiles, till weel into the mornin', an my mither got to sighin' aftener than she sang. Then my faither began to be thrawn in the temper whiles, an' money short. Hame wasna what it had been, an' I kent yon deevil was at the bottom o't, though I was ower young to ken what he was at until"—

Here the man paused, and his gloomy face took on an expression of horrible malignity. "Minister," he said at last, through his clenched teeth, "I daurna gang on. I daurna try to tell ye about thae last twae years, when we livit in yon cursed place. Hell, indeed! Fine I ken what livin' in hell's like. I daurna think much about that time; I hae never daured, or I believe I'd gang fair mad, an' just start killin' every human bein' I met, until I was cut down mysel'. Ye ken what my bonnie, blythe mither grew to be, an' ye ken her awfu' fate, an' ye ken what was my faither's end. He that lo'ed her that weel she maun aye be at his side, or he wasna happy. Minister, when I sent yon foul fiend to hell, I struck him just where my faither struck my mither, an' when I saw him lyin' just as I saw her lie, can ye wonder I was that filled wi' mad joy I could hae louped an' sang?"

"No, Millroy," replied the minister gravely, but without a moment's hesitation. "Trying to put myself in your place, I cannot feel the least surprise; though I confess a different course of action would have filled me with profound admiration. But let me hear your story out, and why you tell it me."

"Weel, sir, when my faither's auld master heard what had happened, he cam' and took me hame wi' him, an' he was awfu' kind. When a' was ower, he said I'd be best out o' the country, an' he paid my passage to New Zealand, whaur my puir mither's sister was weel marriet, an' wanted me to come. They were awfu' gude to me, an' I might hae dune weel there, but I couldna shake aff the longin' for vengeance, an' it grew an' grew, an' I sleepit but little. An' then I got to think when I was lyin' waukrife at nights, I heard my faither an' mither reproachin' me for that I hadna revenged the sheddin' o' their blude. Sae I saved up my money, an' in the end I just slippit awa' an' cam' hame. I'd a lang hunt to find out what had become o' Kelly, but I trackit him out at last. But then my money was a' spent, sae I cam' an' got work here, an' planned it a' out, an' then, at last, I managed it. It was just the money yon deevil had scrapit up out o' the ruin o' souls that brought his judgment on him. I tauld Murphy he could hae a' the cash, sae as I had my vengeance. An' a gude haul they got."

"And you did not shrink from trying to implicate Dr. Munro in the murder—a man who had been very kind to you? That is the sort of rascality in which your thirst for vengeance lands you, Millroy."

"I kent naught o' that, sir, till afterwards, or I'd hae hindered it. That was Murphy's notion."

"Yet you joined in pursuit of Dr. Munro, with intent to kill him."

"Ay, sir, that did I. I'd mair wark to do, an' he might hinder it, wi' the knowledge he'd gotten."

I'd hae slain him, or you, or ony man that was like to do that. When I found naethin' had been said, I doubted he hadna recognised me."

"And your further work was, I suppose, the attempt to destroy both life and property of a man who had never done you the slightest harm? Another proof of what comes of indulging a vindictive spirit, Millroy."

"The hale trade should be stappit by law, sir. What's the law gude for, if it willna interfere to prevent folk bein' lured to destruction wi' the filthy poison that drives them mad? Syne the law willna interfere, a' thae places, an' them that keeps them, maun be hunted down, an' destroyed, till nae man daurs, for his life, to set up sic a deevil's haunt in ony town or village in the hale land."

"No more of this, Millroy," said Arthur Reid firmly. "Do you not see the difficulty you are placing me in? Knowing all I do know, nothing would induce me to use against you what you have already done. But your craving for revenge has grown into a madness, and I am bound to take steps to prevent any further mischief. And such steps, I warn you fairly, will probably lead to examination into these past occurrences."

The man gave him a strange look, half amused, yet with something in it he could not fathom. "Do ye think, sir, I'd hae been tellin' ye a' this, if I'd had a notion o' carryin' on the wark?" he asked.

"What in the world have you told me for? One way, or the other, I can't see any object in your doing so."

"Just because I ken the game's up, as far as I'm concerned. I'm no' sae simple, sir, but that I kent you an' Dr. Munro had some suspicions; an' the moment I saw Mr. Renwick knew me, I kent I could do nae mair. Wi' a' he'd be sure to tell ye, ye'd suspect mair than ever, an' wad set the police on my track the moment I managed anither business. I'd a gran' scheme a' thought out for wreckin' houses in Netherport, an' I was beginnin' to save up my pay for't. But it's nae gude tryin' now, an' I want ye to help me to get back to New Zealand."

"How?"

"There's a story to tell about that, sir. When we were gangin' to do for Kelly, I bargained I wad get a' letters an' papers there might be. They were weel enough pleased wi' that arrangement, an' a fine haul I got. Worth mair, I doubt, if they were properly worked, than the cash they took. It wad be a black day for auld Duff, wi' a' his gran' house up by yonder, if a' the papers that's in this bag cam' to light."

"Ha!" exclaimed the minister. "But what made you bring them here?"

"Because I want ye to help me to mak' a certain use o' them."

"I'll have nothing to do with you and your villainous ways, Millroy," exclaimed the minister, with vehemence. "Take your papers and begone. All I will do for you is"—

The man held up his hand. "Forgie me interruptin' ye, sir, but please to hear me out. A' I want o' ye the now is that ye'll keep these papers,

CHAPTER XXIV

RUNNING THE HAZARD

THE soft semi-darkness of a Scottish summer night had broadened into the full dawn of an early summer morning ere Arthur Reid stole noiselessly upstairs to his bedroom, carrying with him a fulness of acquaintance with the ways and works of the old distiller which, as compared with his previous imperfect knowledge, was fairly paralleled by the brilliant morning light in which he ended his investigations, as against the deepening twilight in which he had begun them. Had he been required to draw up a detailed and accurate statement of the varied transactions of which he had become cognisant, he would have had many hours of arduous labour before him, many flaws to admit, many gaps to bridge over; for Peter Kelly had not arranged and docketed his papers with the careful precision of a man of affairs. But for the purpose of forming a general estimate of the character and doings of the owner of Craigmores, there was abundant and most unedifying material. Jumbled together in utter confusion, both as to date and subject matter, were letters, accounts, drafts of leases, statements of business,

and memoranda, covering many years, during which Kelly had evidently not only worked a public-house of which old Samuel Duff was actually the owner, but had also been his confidential agent in a variety of transactions of different sorts. The letters had mainly the character of relatives without antecedents, those addressed by Kelly to his employer being naturally awaiting. But though they might thus have lacked value as direct evidence, as indications of the nature of the transactions which had taken place they were quite sufficiently explicit to excite both surprise and abhorrence.

Sleep did not come to the minister's pillow in those early morning hours, for it perplexed him greatly to decide upon his own course of action. He very clearly divined what was the "certain use" of the papers in which Millroy wanted to secure his aid, the making terms with Mr. Duff for delivering them up to him; and about any such proceeding there was, at the outset, a disagreeable suspicion of blackmailing, which rendered it repugnant to him. His examination of the papers had not been by any means exhaustive, but he had read quite enough to arouse his disgust and indignation to the point of exciting within him a strong impulse to summon Millroy again to his presence, hand over his bag to him, and bid him take himself and his shady purposes elsewhere, appending a sharp warning that he would be closely watched, and on the first hint of any further crusade against licensed houses, handed over to the police. . But gratification of even so reasonable

and justifiable an impulse might be all too dearly purchased. In his deep commiseration of the cruel wrongs which had warped the character and unsettled the mind of their victim, he had taken upon himself the responsibility of shielding him from the consequences of his past madness; it therefore seemed imperative that he should not now shrink from the task, however distasteful, of personally guiding and controlling the transactions whereby he was to be rendered innocuous in future. His own saddened heart, too, pleaded hard for his special supervision of this risky transaction. Did he renounce all interference with it, it was impossible to tell whom, or what means Millroy would employ to compass his ends; and Millroy's doings might be fraught with grave results for the girl to whom the minister's thoughts still turned with tender regret. Any bungling of the business would easily force into luxuriant bloom a discreditable scandal, very damaging to Ellen Crosbie. Already she was tarnished with the fame of having sacrificed love and loyalty for the sake of gold; and but few who knew the fact would be able, or care, to estimate correctly the extent of her parents' responsibility in that matter. If the trafficking between Duff and Millroy did chance to result in the old man's real character being effectually lighted up for the general public, still deeper discredit could not but follow for the girl who had been taught from infancy to fondle and flatter him. Every envious mother in Netherport would be down on the scandal like a hawk on its prey, and busy shaping it into the aspect most injurious to

the object of Mr. Duff's munificent intentions. Merely as a man, apart from all consideration of his being the man who still cherished a sincere affection for the girl who at her parents' bidding had cast him off, it was not for him to shrink from contact with pitch, when the consequences of his fastidious sensitiveness might be that a woman would be to some extent befouled therewith. No; come what might, he would do his utmost to see the transaction safely and secretly carried through.

He fell asleep at last, just as the working world was issuing forth for the stir and bustle of day, and was guilty of the enormity of not appearing downstairs for breakfast until nearly eleven o'clock. His housekeeper looked very grim.

"It'll nae do ava, sir," she said. "It's a' weel enough preachin' gran' sermons, but they're dear bought wi' yer sittin' up the hale night ower them, as ye'll fin' out ae day, to yer cost."

"Now, that's a shot, Joan," he said, laughing. "You never heard me go upstairs, I know. How do you know whether I went early or late?"

"I didna hear ye gang up, that's true, sir. But when I fill a lamp every day, I ken fine how lang it has burned. Yer study lamp wasna pit out till the daylight cam'."

The silenced minister proceeded with his breakfast, and then set out for the performance of various duties, leaving a message at Dr. Munro's house, in the course of the day, for him to be sure and come to the manse that evening.

Then followed a much more exhaustive examination of this "cargo of iniquity," as Dr. Munro tersely

described it, than the minister had hitherto made; and it was midnight ere Dr. Munro, starting up with an ejaculation of disgust, exclaimed, "The infernal old scoundrel! For Heaven's sake, Reid, wash your hands of the whole business, and leave the madman and the rascal to fight it out as they like."

"Wherefore?" asked Arthur Reid composedly.

"Wherefore? Do you need to ask? Is it fitting that a minister should be mixed up with the doings of rascals?"

"If there was no such thing as disease, Munro, I take it there would be little need of doctors; and if there was no such thing as rascality, I don't see that there would be much more need for ministers."

"Oh, I grant you they're your subject-matter as far as preaching and general treatment is concerned. Preach to old Duff, and treat Millroy, as much as you like. But mixing yourself up, personally, in their goings-on, is a very different matter."

"I should say it is pretty nearly the ministerial equivalent of your work in dissecting-rooms. Did you never hear the charge brought against ministers that, as a rule, they are sadly deficient in knowledge of human nature?"

"I have heard it again and again."

"Well, don't you think, so far as it is true, a want of dissecting-room practice is a good deal to blame? If we don't study the nature of rascality objectively, how are we to learn how to treat it remedially?"

"There may be something in that. But what

in the direction of spiritual p
use such a term, can you l
monomaniac to levy blackmail

"I believe that I shall have
opportunity of studying a very
evil passions."

"That may be. But the
dearly bought. I am really ve
Reid. No honest man is a
monomaniac like Millroy, or
Duff. Between the two, they
you in some tremendous mes
suspicion what they are at.
I also, for the matter of that,
long way already in the directio
after the fact, to a murder.
should surely warn you not to v

"Common prudence is gen
guide how to keep one's own
harm's way. But a truce to fe
truth is, you are only urging
most infinitely prefer to follow

"Then why in the name of
do you need so much urging?"

"Firstly, because I think my
business may be advantageous
Secondly,"—he paused for a mo
don't you see, there is a woman

"A woman?" repeated Dr
puzzled tone. He was thinking
at Craigmores.

"Yes. You see, if I take
guidance of this transaction.

anything to do with it, who can forecast what Millroy may take it into his head to do? A terrible scandal might easily be created, which would react in a very disastrous way upon Miss Crosbie."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Reid," replied his friend in a very subdued tone. "I had never thought of that possibility."

"Naturally. But, of course, it occurred at once to me. Her mother, whom by the bye you judged much more accurately than I did, could not manage to hold her tongue when she found her daughter was to be turned into an heiress. Everyone therefore knows, or will know immediately, that she threw me over in order to secure the fortune old Duff promised her. Of course, it was entirely her parents' doings, but it has an ugly look; and if anything very bad about the old man should come to light just now, it would make things worse for her. If it was not for her, I really am not sure if even the chance of thus getting well rid of Millroy, without doing him any harm, would induce me to have anything to do with the business."

"I see. It certainly complicates the situation. What I should like you to do would be to send Millroy to old Dr. Crosbie, and tell him, as Duff is such a dear friend and benefactor of his, he had better manage the matter as may be best for his character."

"It would be fair enough as far as the parents are concerned. But I do not believe, even then, they would renounce his gold; and that being the case, I would rather, if I possibly can, prevent my poor Nellie from ever knowing the true character

of the man to whom she is indebted for her fortune."

"Well, if it must be, it must. But I do beseech you, my dear fellow, be very wary. As I said to you before, the cunning of these monomaniacs would take in the very devil himself. I can't shake off the suspicion that fellow has some game on hand which he is keeping to himself. Watch yourself at every step."

"You may depend on my doing that, and I think I am pretty safe. Had I had no knowledge of Millroy's condition, I might have been easily taken in. But as it is, I think I shall be sufficiently on my guard."

"I hope so, I'm sure," replied his friend dubiously.

"But you don't feel very confident? Well, look here, Munro. I'll send for Millroy, and hear just what he wants. If he makes any proposition or suggestion which strikes me as the least doubtful, I'll reserve my decision. I'll tell him to come to me again, and meantime I'll consult you."

"Ay, do so. As a looker-on I might very possibly notice points which would escape you."

Millroy was accordingly bidden to appear once more at the manse, and during the intervening time the minister did little else but turn over in his mind every possible precaution he could take, in dealing with him, to circumvent any meditated treachery on his part. When Millroy came, in the exercise of this subtle caution he proceeded to experiment on the nature of the man's sentiments towards Mr. Duff. If he really only wanted to secure from him a certain fixed and definite advan-

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tage, good. But there was no certainty the bag left at the manse contained the whole of the compromising documents which had come into Millroy's possession. If he had in view a perennial blackmailing business, that was a very different matter; and it was far from impossible his thirst for vengeance might find a certain satisfaction in inflicting that sort of torture on a man he could not hope to get rid of in the summary manner in which he had dealt with Kelly.

"Well, Millroy," he said, "I have looked pretty carefully over your papers, and I confess I am rather at a loss to decide which is the greater rascal—Samuel Duff or Peter Kelly."

"I think mysel', sir, there's nae much to choose between them," replied the man readily. "But then, ye ken, it's demand that's the cause o' supply. If there were nae drink-shops allowed, there'd be nae fellows like yon auld Duff makin' the poison that's sellt in them. We maun get the drinkin'-places rooted clean out o' the land. Then there'll soon be an end o' the folk makin' the stuff."

The minister smiled. The man's sentiments were satisfactory enough to render it needless to deal with his logic.

"There is something in that, certainly," he said. "But now tell me, in the first place, clearly and shortly, exactly what you want me to do."

"Just this, sir, an' nae mair. To help me to sell thae papers to Mr. Duff for as much as'll tak' me back to New Zealand, and gie me a bit start there."

"Having got which money," said the minister to



himself, "you will probably disappear, and be next heard of carrying on your infernal work somewhere else." Aloud, he said—"Do you remember, Millroy, telling me you would have killed Dr. Munro when you thought he might hinder your work?"

"Ay, sir. Sae I would."

"Very well. Then you must understand that after that admission I can place no possible confidence in you. And you must answer me some very close questions before I make up my mind whether or not I will help you. Your plan is unpleasantly like blackmailing, and but for your cruel wrongs, coupled with some other considerations, I would have nothing to do with it."

"I'm quite ready to answer ony question ye like, sir. As for blackmail, I dinna want his cursed gold. I wadna tak' a penny, but that I've nae siller mysel', an' canna get awa' wi'out it."

"Well, then, the first thing I want to know is, why you are so anxious I should interfere in this matter at all?"

"Because I ken ye're a gentleman, an' will no' play ony man fause."

"But why do you not go straight to Mr. Duff and settle it with him?"

Millroy smiled. "I was never extra bright, sir, at least syne I got that bang on the heid. But I'm no' quite sae simple as that."

"I do not see the simplicity."

"Why, what think ye wad happen if I went to him?"

"What?"

"He'd speak me fair enough, I've nae doubt,

an' be for giein' me a gude price for the papers. An' when I went to deliver them up, I'd likely never come back alive, or if I did, it wad be wi'out either money or papers. Na, na, sir. It was just to see what sort o' a way he livit, I went an' asked him about Duncan's place; an' when I saw a' the lot o' servants an' the like he's got up there, I kent fine it wad be nae place for me to gang on sic an errand."

The minister did not reply. Certainly, when the man in question was the one whose business transactions were revealed by the papers in his possession, the caution could hardly be regarded as greatly overstrained.

"Well, but what is it, then, you want me to do for you?" he asked, after a moment's silence.

"I want ye to see Mr. Duff yersel', sir, an' tell him about my havin' these papers an' letters, an' that ye've seen them, an' can be answerable to him that it's weel worth his while to get them back. He'll likely hae forgotten about mony o' them. An' then tell him he shall hae them, if he'll gie my price for them."

"Good. But there we come to another point I must have made quite clear to me. Supposing I agree to do what you wish, and Mr. Duff is willing to pay your price for the papers, how am I to know, when you have got the money, you will really go off to New Zealand, and not use it to carry on your work of destruction?"

"I doubt, sir, if I did get the money, that's just about what I would do. I'd no' be able to resist the temptation, an' I ken fine it wad be nae gude,

sae I dinna want to be tempted. I dinna want to get a farthin' o' the money. If Mr. Duff 'll agree, I want him to pay my passage out to New Zealand, an' gie an order to someone out there to spend a certain sum in settin' me up in ony business I may fix on. That's a' I want, an' it's nae a big sum I'll ask for. I wad hae nane o't, if I had ony siller mysel'. But I canna pay my ain way out, an' I ken my ain people there wadna help me now, after my giein' them the slip as I did."

"Well, your wish seems reasonable enough," Mr. Reid said. "But how is the business to be managed?"

"A'thegither through you, sir. I wadna trust yon auld fox a yard farther than I can see him. He maun come some evenin', after hours, an' meet me here. Then, when ye tell me he's gien' ye the money to get my ticket for me, an' the money beyond that I want too, sae as ye can gie the order to some bank out there yersel', I'll gie him up the papers in your presence. I ken fine there'll be nae playin' fause when ye've a han' in the matter."

The minister sat reflecting in silence for a little while. Turn the matter which way he would, there seemed to be no possible flaw in the arrangement which the man might turn to account to give a disastrous issue to the transaction. If there was the smallest circumstance which might arouse suspicion, it was the care he seemed to have taken to tie his own hands. The only remaining point for consideration was one concerning Millroy himself.

"You seem to have planned it all out very suitably," he said. "But I think you have forgotten one important point."

"What's that, sir?"

"Does it not occur to you that Mr. Duff's first question to me will probably be, 'How did Millroy gain possession of these papers?'"

"Ye're no' bound to ken that, sir."

"No. I may decline to hazard any suggestion. But it is very likely suspicions may be excited in Mr. Duff's mind, and if he communicates with the police, the results might be very disastrous for you."

"If he did that, sir, it wad be the police, not him, that wad get the papers. Na, na. He'll no' do that. But, ony gait, I'll tak' the risk o' that on mysel'."

"Very well. I will put myself in communication with Mr. Duff immediately, and let you know the results."

"Thank ye, sir. I'm greatly obliged to ye for yer help. I ken I could never rest quiet in this country; but I think I'll be able to bide quiet ower yonder now."

"Then, ere you go, tell me one thing which has puzzled me very much. How did you manage to wreck Duncan's house?"

"Wi'out ony breeks? I kent ye'd been speerin'. That was ae thing made me ken, after Mr. Renwick cam', I could do nae mair."

"Yes, and without Mrs. Aitken seeing you leave the house."

"It was easy dune, sir. I'd made mysel' a

“Quite true. It is just one of those cases in which one's reason is satisfied, while all the rest of one absolutely refuses to acquiesce in its decision. Well, the die is cast, and the sooner you see the old villain the better.”

CHAPTER XXV

CROSS PURPOSES

WITH the utmost possible formality and stateliness, the minister of Glendarff informed Mr. Samuel Duff that business of the gravest importance compelled him to beg for an interview, and requested to know when it would be convenient for him to call at Craigmore. The accidental use of the word "beg" entangled the old distiller in conclusions which he hugged with huge satisfaction. He was not addicted to the use of "polite" letter-writers, and his own style was somewhat rugged. A man who "begged" for an interview must be coming in humble, submissive mood. With a delighted chuckle, he threw the letter across the breakfast-table to Mrs. Baird.

"Look at that," he said. "I knew how it would end. Going to eat humble pie at last; and by the Lord Harry, he shall have his bellyful of it."

The housekeeper took up the note, glanced through it, and asked, "What object do you suppose he has in view?"

"What object? Why, when a man 'begs' for an interview, I take it he wants to ask favours. What should he want but to make his submission,

and try to get back his young woman and her fortune?"

"And what would you do, in that case?"

"Make him smart soundly for his airs, to be sure, and then decide further according to whether he takes his punishment meekly enough to please me."

A faint smile played round Mrs. Baird's lips. "If that's your notion, Samuel," she said, "you were never wider of your mark in your life. That young man was in thorough earnest when he refused to have anything to do with your money. He will never go back from his determination."

"How do you know?"

"I know when a man rings true."

"Then what in the world can he possibly want? There ain't any heritors' business forward just now. If that's not what's in his mind, I'm about the last person he'd want to see. I'll lay I'm right."

"Well, you need only fix a time to see him, in order to ensure being effectually undeceived," the woman replied, as she rose to leave the room.

Mr. Samuel Duff remained unconvinced. He possessed a large amount of natural acuteness, of a certain sort, but having concentrated it through life on the task of heaping up money, his capacity for believing anyone else capable of lofty and generous sentiment had shrivelled into nothingness, and he fondly clung to the sweet hope of further trampling on the man who had dared dispute his claim to importance on the mere score of possessing more banknotes than the majority

of his neighbours. Having despatched a note to say he would be at home the whole of the following day, he resigned himself to delicious mental rehearsals of the coming interview, in which, as he played both sides of the game himself, his triumph was superlatively magnificent. He lingered lovingly on the complete humiliation he would inflict on this highflying young minister, actually writing down some of the cutting remarks and biting suggestions he would make; and revelling in the thoroughness with which he would demonstrate to him that in place of being a very superb and incomparable person, he was a pitiful ass, who had gone a long way out of his road to render himself ridiculous and contemptible.

Under these circumstances the interview could not have failed to be full of interest for any independent looker-on thoroughly cognisant of the mental workings of both men. Arthur Reid, unable to repress a certain chivalrous sentiment of pity for an old man on the verge of the grave, doomed to such a cruel humiliation as it was his lot to inflict on him, was absorbed in the effort so to frame his sentences that they might not add one needless sting to the shame and self-abasement they must produce. The old distiller, discounting a malicious revenge, was prepared heartily to enjoy a sort of war-dance of triumph on the lacerated feelings of the fool who had prepared such an ugly defeat for himself by venturing to cross swords with a man towering above his fellows by the simple process of standing on his money-bags.

A violent mental somersault on the part of each

man was clearly necessary before they could reach any common basis for a conference.

It did strike Mr. Duff, when the minister was ushered into his presence, that his almost sternly resolute face and demeanour showed a striking absence of the nervous embarrassment on which he had calculated on feasting his delighted eyes, and the mere fact aroused his wrath. "Oh oh, my young coxcomb," he said to himself, "going to carry it with a high hand, are you, and be mightily condescending towards an old sinner? You shall dance to a different tune ere long."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Reid," he said jauntily. "Fine day for a walk. Rather hot, though, coming over the hill, ain't it?"

"Not unpleasantly so."

"Well, sit you down, and let's hear what this important interview is to be about. The last time we met we didn't part in the sort of way that made me think you'd want to see me again so soon."

"My visit to-day, Mr Duff, is one of necessity, not of choice."

"Oh yes. I have no doubt of that. But when people make their beds for themselves, they have to lie on them. And the bed that's got humble pie for a mattress is a most uncommon nasty one, I know. I knew you were bound to come, sooner or later; but I didn't think it would be quite so soon."

Mr. Reid hesitated for a moment. Interpreting the words by the light of his own inner consciousness, the undisguised satisfaction on the speaker's

face puzzled him not a little.
manner paved the way for him

"Do you mean me to unde
last, "that you are aware of
visit?"

"Of course I am. Perfectly

"I am greatly surprised, then
I am spared making a very pair

"Gad, but you ain't, though
I'll let you off in that way.
what you have to say just as
about it. You've had your
you've got to smart for it."

A man of cultivated mind
does not stare open-mouthed
Arthur Reid came nearer the
moment than he had ever done
"I am totally at a loss to under
mean," he said.

"Devil a bit! You needn't
You know plaguey well what
don't like humble pie any more

A sort of flash of sudden suspicion
the minister's face. "Do you
asked, "you think I am come here
subject personally connected with

"I'm very sure of it, and you
ahead without further loss of time
to make full recantation, I can
come to beg pardon for all you
and try to get back your your
money. You'll—Eh?—what?"

A sudden short, hearty laugh



stopped him. "I beg your pardon for the interruption, Mr. Duff," he said. "But of all the ridiculous notions a man ever got into his head, that is about the most absurd. Do you really mean you thought I had come to take back my refusal to touch your money?"

"I am sure of it."

"Then, upon my word, if you can credit another man with being such a pitiful sneak, you merit the humiliation which is before you."

It was Mr. Duff's turn now to stare open-mouthed, and he did it with unreserved frankness.

"What the devil do you mean?"

"I mean that far from having any personal interest in this interview, I merely come to you as representative of a third person, and as a very reluctant representative, to state to you the terms on which you may be spared the humiliation of most discreditable revelations regarding your past life."

He saw a sort of livid hue overspread the evil face, and wondered whether, perchance, his words might not have stabbed deeper than he was himself aware. There might well be even darker chapters in the old man's life than Millroy's find had brought to light. But with the changing colour there was no loss of presence of mind. "Oh ho," he said, with a well-assumed accent of scorn, "a blackmailing expedition! A very nice sort of occupation for a pious minister! Pray, what's to be your share of the profits?"

"Reserve your taunts, Mr. Duff," replied Arthur Reid coldly, "until you know better how to plant

"As Millroy knows their value, and means to make use of them, it is perhaps as well for you he did bring them to a minister, whose profession exonerates him from all necessity to hold the scales of justice. Perhaps you do not quite remember all that Kelly had in his possession. Here, for instance, is a brief extract from a letter so remarkable that I could not resist the temptation to copy it down. Shall I read it to you? 'The fellow is an ass, and I'm not going to lower his rent. There are fools around him, by hundreds, who'd spend every farthing they earned, or stole, on drink, if he only knew how to work them properly. It's his own fault if the house doesn't pay splendidly.' That is a fair specimen of a good many more letters. Is that the sort of thing you would not mind the public getting hold of?"

Mr. Duff's face had changed. It had not lost its resolute expression, but superadded upon it was the fierce wariness of a wild animal at bay.

"How did Millroy become possessed of these papers?" he asked.

"That is for him to explain. My only connection with the matter is to prevent him, if possible, from making a bad use of them."

"Out of a feeling of ministerial benevolence, of course! But why didn't the fellow come straight to me?"

"Because he does not choose to trust you. He openly expresses his conviction you would lay some trap for him, and wrest the papers from him by violence."

"Sharp fellow, that. Must have seen a deal of

the world! And pray what's your particular part in this business?"

"To tell you the terms on which Millroy is ready, if you choose to meet him at my house, to hand over the papers to you."

"Well. Let's hear what they are?"

The minister propounded the terms. The old man smiled grimly.

"Very nicely arranged indeed. And suppose, Mr. Reid, instead of agreeing to this arrangement, I simply refuse to have anything to do with it, and prosecute you both for conspiracy to blackmail?"

"I fear you will learn, by Millroy promptly disposing of the papers to someone who will use them without any scruple, what is the difference between genuine blackmailing and this attempt of mine to extricate you scathless from an awkward position, and you will gain nothing by your move but an exposure you will do well to avoid."

"Bless me, how benevolent we are, to be sure! And suppose I allowed myself to fall into this nice little trap, which, to do you justice, I believe you tender more in the character of dupe than knave, how soon would a fresh batch of papers turn up, and have to be bought, and so on, and so on, for ever?"

"There is no danger."

"How am I to be sure of that?"

"Because I have a hold on Millroy. There are episodes in his past life, known to me, which it would not be well for him should come out. I should let him very clearly understand that any

attempt at blackmailing, in that way, would be followed by my at once making use of the knowledge I possess against him. But, at the same time, I believe your suspicions are quite groundless."

The old distiller sat meditating for a little while, with a heavy scowl gathering over his face.

"A man's a fool to have a soft spot about him," he said at last. "But for one thing, I'd tell you and your precious accomplice to go to the devil, and do what you please."

"If you have a soft spot about you, it is something to your credit of which I was quite unaware."

"None of your jibes. You think I'm down, and you can kick me as much as you like. But you may chance yet to find out I've more fight in me than you calculate upon. But there is one point on which you and I do agree, and that's just where you have me. I wouldn't like my little girl to get hold of all this business, so I'll agree to some sort of terms. Perhaps I'll suggest some of my own."

Mr. Reid hesitated. "As I have taken this matter in hand, Mr. Duff," he said at last, "I should be sorry to seem unwilling to do what I can to meet your wishes. But I'm bound to tell you John Millroy is a very dour sort of fellow. I do not think you will get him to move one inch from the position he has taken up."

"All right. Perhaps Mr. Millroy 'll learn something he doesn't know. I'll send you word when I've thought the matter over."

That mirror, on the contrary, occupied an important place in Arthur Reid's musings as he returned to Glendarff. The malignancy of the glance he had caught from its surface, levelled at himself, was certainly startling, and coupled with the question which accompanied it, afforded food for much speculation. He was almost in the act of stopping at Mrs. Aitken's cottage, to leave a message bidding Millroy come to the manse that evening, when he saw that worthy himself coming towards him, at a little distance. He walked on, judiciously regulating his pace so as to ensure their meeting just where a piece of waste land intervened between the houses, and speech was therefore possible, with some certainty how near keen listeners might be.

"I have just returned from Craigmore," he said.

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Duff is, I think, inclined to agree to your proposals. He is going away to-morrow morning for a week, but will communicate with me on his return. Where have you those papers, Millroy?"

"Locked up in my box, sir."

"Mr. Duff seemed very anxious to know where they were. I think you would be wise to lodge them with me."

"I'll bring them round to-night, sir."

"Good." And he walked on. He had no intention the scheme should come to nothing, if he could prevent it. If the old distiller could possess himself of the papers, either by fraud or force, there was an end of all chance of getting rid of Millroy and his monomania, without resort to the extreme

measure of handing him over to the tender mercies of the law.

The papers were deposited that night in Mr. Reid's strong box, and he was then left to forget the whole subject, if he could, until Saturday night, when Millroy again came to him.

"I beg your pardon for coming to-night, sir," he said. "But I thought I wad like to tell ye a curious thing that's happened."

"What is that?"

"There's been a man speerin' for me, at Mrs. Aitken, to-day, that says he's some sort o' far-away frien' o' mine, come frae ower the sea."

"Why is that curious?"

"Oh, weel, of course, I have frien's in New Zealand. The thing that's curious is that ony o' them wad be askin' for John Millroy."

"Oh ho!" said the minister. "Sits the wind in that quarter? Of course, I never thought of that."

"Maybe it's a case o' a lang ladle to sup wi' the deil. He tauld the auld woman he was just particular anxious to see me, an' she said he'd best gang to the foreman at the pits. But he said he hadna time to bide, an' he speered at her a heap about the Sabbath day. He wad be stappin' ower the Sabbath in Netherport, an' did I gang to the kirk? an' what time wad I be likely to be at hame, if he cam' up? She tauld him I was maistly out in the mornin', an' she awa' to the kirk, an' he'd nae find onybody, likely, till after midday; but in the afternoon I'd likely be about the house. Sae he said he wad try to call about twae o'clock; an' she

was to tell me he had somethin' maist particular to say to me."

"But what do you suppose is the scheme?"

"I've been thinkin' about that. I doubt it'll be to get me to gang somewhere and drink, an' then to end up wi' a dose o' some doctored stuff, an' bring me hame helpless. He'll hae a pal somewhere. Then, Mrs. Aitken bein' but a frail auld body, it wad be natural enough they wad offer to carry me up to my bed, an' likely to sit a while wi' me. The rest wad be easy."

"A risky plan, surely."

"I dinna ken about that, sir. If a man can be got to drink, a thing o' that sort's easy dune. I'm greatly diverted wi' the notion, an' 'll tak' gude care to be at hame. I'm no' just very gleg wi' my tongue, but I think it'll be a hot time for this auld frien' o' the family."

"Have a care what you are doing, Millroy," the minister said a little anxiously. "Of course, I know it's no use their trying you with drink. But when they find it is useless, they may resort to more desperate measures."

"I'll no' gang a yard frae the house, sir. Ye may be sure o' that."

"Very good. Then come up after the evening service, and tell me what happens."

Mr. Reid was not, however, destined to wait for intelligence until Sunday evening. Within an hour after the conclusion of the morning service, all the village was in a ferment over the news that Mrs. Aitken's cottage had been broken into during her absence at church, the marauders having effected

an entrance through a back window. The strangest part of the affair, however, was, that though the house had been ransacked from floor to roof, not the smallest trifle had been taken, and the breaking of a few locks, that of Millroy's box among the number, was the extent of the damage done. It was clearly an ill-conditioned sort of practical joke, and a thriving crop of quarrels sprang up out of speculations as to who could have been the perpetrators thereof.

CHAPTER XXVI

A PIECE OF WIRE NETTING

EARLY in the following week Mr. Duff appeared one morning on foot at Glendarff manse. "Well," he said, after a rather curt greeting to the minister, "what about this precious client of yours?"

"John Millroy? He is quite ready to meet you whenever you like to appoint a time."

"Well, but look here. There are one or two things to be settled. I've no notion of being made a fool of, if I can help it. Do you pledge yourself the fellow shall not receive a farthing in cash to go and work more mischief with? There are clever rascals who'd turn out all the letters he wanted by the score, if he could pay for them."

"You need not feel the slightest fear on that score, Mr. Duff. I have distinctly told Millroy I have no confidence in him, and I am quite as anxious to be well rid of him as you can be. I shall not only be very careful he does not get one farthing in money, but I shall engage someone to see him embark for New Zealand."

"Very well. Then I'll come and meet him here."

"It will have to be in the evening, remember. He could not get away from his work to meet you without attracting attention."

"Yes, I'd rather it was the evening. Let me see. It's over ten miles, and a steep pull up the glen. I wouldn't like to give my horses less than an hour and a half. I dine about seven. Tell the fellow to be here sharp at nine o'clock on Friday evening. And mind, I hold you pledged there shan't be any trickery."

"There will certainly be no trickery, Mr. Duff. Of course, I have no power to compel Millroy to keep his appointment; but I fully believe he is quite in earnest about it. And it is your only chance of getting these papers safely into your own keeping."

Then a sudden impulse seized him to take upon the man whose constant effort, since their first meeting, had been to annoy and insult him, such a vengeance as not even the most sanctimonious of human beings could condemn; and, with a sparkle of mischief in his eyes, which belied his assumption of extreme gravity, he added—

"Indeed, you already owe it to my vigilance that the chance of securing them has not been lost to you."

"How?"

"Millroy had been keeping them in his own box. I told him, one day last week, I did not think it was a very safe place for them, and suggested their being transferred to some more secure repository. Curiously enough, on Sunday, the cottage where he lodged was broken into, when no one was at home, and ransacked. Had the papers not been removed, I should only have had to tell you, to-day, they were gone neither I nor Millroy knew whither."

"Tell that to the horse marines," snarled the old man, with a vindictive glance. "Some confounded trick of that rascal's. You seem mighty concerned on my account. It would have been more to the purpose if you'd have stuck to the papers, and burned them when you had the chance. And that's just what you would have done, I take it, if you'd really been as plaguey anxious about your friends down yonder in Netherport as you let on to be."

"I have no doubt you would have preferred that course, and so, for the matter of that, should I, as far as my own preferences were concerned. But to say nothing of various points for consideration unknown to you, it was only after I had given Millroy a solemn promise I would return the papers, if I did not choose to act for him, that I had any chance of examining them. You could hardly suppose I should break that promise?"

"Oh, I don't suppose anything, except that everything's been going wrong in this confounded place ever since you came here," retorted the surly old man. "Good-day. Remember, Friday night, at nine o'clock, sharp."

Millroy received notice of the appointment with absolute neutrality of manner, in fact with such an air of dreamy abstraction that Arthur Reid hesitated for a moment, almost in doubt whether the man had fully grasped the meaning of what he had told him.

"Mind, Millroy," he said, "Mr. Duff wants you to be very punctual. He has a long drive home."

"Ay, it's a lang road he has to gang," replied Millroy; "but a gran' hame for the like o' him, when

he gets there. Never fear, sir
him. Puir folk maunna keep ri

"And mind you, Millroy," a
"as I told you, I won't trust you
see you. I shall expect you t
Zealand on the first possible
shall send someone to see that y
stretched forbearance to the bre
warn you fairly, at the first hi
or double-dealing on your part,
information I possess in the har

"A' richt, sir ; ye needna f
Friday night, ye'll hae nae mair
Then he looked up with a softer
face, and added, "I'm real so
much trouble, for ye've aye beer
I could not compass the matter

Most devoutly Arthur Reid
than forty-eight hours had not
the wealthy owner of Craigmor
in his handsomely-appointed ca
bag full of rascality, the mere pr
his house was a sort of nightm
imagination, stimulated by a c
nervous excitement, was perpet
before him vivid pictures of the
misery and crime which, increas
the rolling years, must have
iniquitous transactions therein
with no little pleasure he welco
the arrival, together, of Dr. I
Mackenzie, both of whom at onc
volubly, without harrying him

kindliness of interest in his evident depression of spirits. The one knew, the other thought he knew, of quite sufficient cause.

"By the bye, Munro," said young Mackenzie, after a brief pause in the conversation, with cheerful confidence in having hit upon a subject wholly free from undesirable suggestiveness, "your wish about Millroy is coming to pass."

"What wish?"

"That my father would get rid of him. I don't exactly mean he is doing so, but Millroy called at the office this afternoon, on his way to work, and dismissed himself. He said he should not be at the pits after Wednesday."

"I am very glad to hear it. What is he going to do?"

"I don't know. Father could get nothing out of him, except that he was going to leave Glendarff almost directly. Our foreman says he is tremendously glad; that the fellow has seemed more brooding and absent-minded than ever of late. Some of the men have been complaining very much about it, and saying some of their lives would pay, one of these days, for his dazed way of going on."

Arthur Reid woke from short and fitful slumber on Friday morning with a sigh of relief. By the next time of his awaking to his active daily life, the worst part of the ugly business in which, against his inclination, and not without some remonstrances on the part of his judgment, he had become mixed up, would be over. If Millroy came, the rest would be plain sailing; and if he did not keep his

appointment, Mr. Reid was fully resolved to make it plain sailing for himself. He would, on his own responsibility, hand over the compromising documents to Mr. Duff, retaining the cheque, to be afterwards used or returned as circumstances might require. And he would deal very sharply with the man who had abused his confidence.

Perturbed and uneasy all day, as the evening drew on he grew restless and nervous. He tried to read, and he tried to write, but found both attempts failures. The minute hand of the clock seemed to travel slower and slower with each succeeding hour. When at last it pointed to a quarter to nine, he could remain still no longer. He went into the kitchen, on some pretext, to see if Millroy had come, but found Joan alone. He went out of the back door, and passed slowly round to the front of the house. There the sound of a footfall broke the silence, and he held his breath to listen. It drew near, passed the gate, died away in silence. He walked back into the house; the clock was just striking nine. He moved aimlessly about the room for a few moments, then walked again to the door, and looked out into the growing dusk of the fading twilight. At last his ear distinctly caught the distant beat of horses' hoofs trotting rapidly. It was ten minutes past nine. Where was Millroy, with all his promises of punctuality? He could not plead difficulties with clocks or watches, for time was very carefully kept at the pits. Mr. Reid returned to his study. The hand of the clock travelled on to a quarter past nine. A feeling of extreme irritation grew rapidly within

him. He had not the faintest intention of facing for any lengthened time the taunts and sneers with which he felt certain the old distiller would greet the non-appearance of Millroy. He would give the man ten minutes, from the time of Mr. Duff's arrival, to allow for any unexpected accident. If he did not then appear, Mr. Duff should have the papers, and go his way.

This resolution he had reached just as the carriage drew up at the gate. The night was so perfectly still he could hear every sound, although the windows of his study looked out to the side of the house. The indications of slackening speed; the grinding of a wheel against the curbstone of the footpath; the tramp of the horses' feet as they pulled up. Then followed almost instantly the faint slam of the carriage-door, and the sound of a voice—Mr. Duff giving some direction to his coachman. The clink of the gate-latch was audible; there was a footfall on the stone steps leading up from the road; then on the gravel walk for a moment; and then—a short, sharp report—a stifled cry—a sudden clatter of horses' hoofs, breaking into a furious gallop—the heavy roll of wheels, turning at tremendous speed—shouts and cries—then another sharp report. Arthur Reid rushed out of the house. Almost as he did so, a tremendous crash, at a little distance, announced that the terrified horses had dashed the carriage violently against some intruding obstacle, and shouts and screams from various directions were heard in increasing number. He rushed down towards the gate, and came so suddenly on the body of Mr.

number of trustworthy assistants, and a few women to help the housekeeper, were allowed to remain within the precincts of the manse. A fleet-footed messenger was already speeding over the hill to Netherport, in search of medical and legal aid. Mr. Duff's coachman had had an almost miraculous escape. He had been in the act of descending from his box, with the intention of adjusting some strap about the harness, when the sharp report of the gun, so close at hand, startled his high-mettled horses. Their sudden spring had thrown him violently to the ground, but he had come off with only unimportant bruises, and with a few assistants was following, as best he might, his vanished steeds, which were galloping wildly away among the lonely hills, their track marked by fragments of the shattered carriage and broken harness.

In as short a time as possible the wounded men were undressed and placed in bed; but it was a long time ere Arthur Reid and the doctor had a chance of interchanging any remarks on the tragedy. At length, however, Dr. Munro had accomplished all that could possibly be done without further aid, and there was nothing to do but wait for the help which could not now be very long in arriving. Then, for a few moments, the two men stood together by the fire hastily kindled in the study. With a faint twist of his pallid features into a semblance of a smile, the minister looked at his friend, and said—

"The cunning of a monomaniac would take in the devil himself."

Dr. Munro shook his head. "I could not rest,"

he said. "I was listening at my own door from the moment the carriage passed. I had a foreboding all along of something not right."

"So, for the matter of that, had I."

"Then why in the world did you go on with the business?"

The minister sighed, and answered rather sadly—

"When sentiment manages to get the reins out of the hands of judgment, Munro, the wisdom in action, of the best of us, is a very uncertain quantity."

Dr. Munro stood silent for a few moments, as if in thought. "After all," he said at last, "if you had thrown over the whole business, I am not sure it would have made much difference, save that you would have been saved much pain and distress. The fellow clearly meant to do for Duff, and, with those papers in his possession, he would have managed it some way or other. On my soul, Reid, I doubt if a greater rascal ever met a better merited punishment. And in thus completing his vengeance, Millroy has, fortunately, cut short his own powers of mischief."

"Are both wounds mortal?"

"I think so. As far as I can judge, without making a closer investigation than I care to attempt until Ross arrives, Duff's spine is injured in a way which must prove fatal, though he may linger for a day or two."

"And Millroy?"

"I feel sure he cannot live many hours."

A message came at the moment. "Would the minister come and speak to Millroy?" Mr. Reid glanced inquiringly at the doctor.

she an' my faither 'll lie peacefu' now in their graves. Their son has avenged them."

He closed his eyes wearily for a little time, then opened them again. "Ye'll burn thae papers now, sir, will ye no'?" he said.

"Certainly."

"An' ye'll let auld Mrs. Aitken keep the siller an' my few bit things. She was aye gude to me."

Again his eyes closed. He was evidently growing weaker, and his mind seemed to wander. "Faither—mither—avenger o' blude,"—these were the only utterances sufficiently distinct to be audible.

Arthur Reid sat by his side, now and again putting a few drops of some cooling drink between his lips. Spirits of any sort they had not the cruelty to bring near him. Soon came sounds of arrival, and Dr. Ross, accompanied by a colleague from Netherport, joined Dr. Munro. But there was little they could do save confirm his already expressed opinion. Millroy was sinking fast. Mr. Duff might possibly linger for a few days, but the injuries he had received were mortal.

After they had made their examination and retired, Mr. Duff, too, desired the presence of Mr. Reid. He was lying very quiet, but the keen, piercing eyes were watchful and restless as ever, and there was malice in the glance he fixed on the minister.

"You promised to be answerable for no trickery," he said.

"This is not trickery, it is treachery, Mr. Duff—

a thing as far from my thoughts as from yours. I do not profess to have wished to serve you, but I honestly believed that I was doing so."

"What did the fellow want to kill me for?"

"He is a monomaniac, apparently, determined to destroy everyone connected with the drink traffic."

"The fool! Now, tell me just what those doctor fellows say. The truth, mind, straight out, and no preaching."

"They say the injury you have received must prove fatal."

"I was sure of that. But how long shall I live?"

"That it is impossible to say. They think you may linger for a day or two."

"Oh, that's all right. You see, I've never made my will. Won't do to let the Crown get everything. Eh?"

Mr. Reid made no reply, and after looking at him for a few moments, the wounded man continued—

"Send you off a message directly to Sloan to come. It won't do to lose any time. Get some quick fellow to go over the hill. That'll be the shortest way."

Another messenger accordingly sped over the hill, and roused the startled lawyer from his morning slumbers. Mr. Reid hailed his arrival with a sense of indescribable relief, for nothing would induce Mr. Duff to allow him to remain long out of the room, and almost every word addressed to him contained a covert taunt or insinuation, which it was impossible for him to resent.

The interview with the lawyer was a lengthy one, and when at last he came from the dying man's bedside, with some closely-written sheets of paper in his hand, his face wore a somewhat startled and perplexed expression. He asked for Dr. Munro.

"The will that Mr. Duff has instructed me to prepare," he said, "is a rather remarkable one. I suppose, Dr. Munro, there can be no doubt of his mental competency to make one?"

"Not the slightest doubt. Mr. Duff's mind is perfectly clear."

"Then, Mr. Reid, I shall have to ask you to allow me the use of one of your rooms for an hour or so. Mr. Duff is most urgent that the will should be drawn up and signed before I leave the house."

"Certainly," the minister said. "My study is quite at your disposal."

"Thank you very much. It is really too bad taking possession of your house in this way. But what a terrible affair this is! What a series of distressing occurrences it has been your fate to be connected with since your arrival in this neighbourhood, Mr. Reid!"

The minister was saved all necessity for finding any reply to this singularly happy, well-turned reminder, for at the moment his housekeeper appeared in the doorway.

"Wad ye come, sir? I think Millroy's gangin' fast now, an' I doubt he wants ye. He said yer name the now."

The minister hastened instantly to the bedside of the poor outcast, at once the victim and the

avenger of such cruel wrongs. There was a marked change already in his appearance, and it was evident his blighted life was ebbing fast away. He knew who was beside him, and faintly signed to him to sit down. "A' my lane—nae a frien' in the world," he murmured. With dimmed eyes Arthur Reid seated himself, and took the limp hand in his; and as his imagination conjured up visions of the past, the happy, joyous child and boy-hood, gradually merging into the slowly gathering gloom, and at last the overwhelming blackness of darkness for ever, a great wave of compassion surging up, swept every other feeling out of his mind, and he gently pressed the hand growing momentarily colder in his own. Millroy opened his eyes, smiled, and closed them again. Then once more his lips moved, and the minister, bending down, caught the words—"mither—avenge—blude,"—and with one or two deeply-drawn breaths, at widening intervals, the ill-fated Edward Lane passed to where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest. And the record of his wrongs, his madness, and his vengeance alone remained, written for ever in the book of remembrance of the Almighty God.

CHAPTER XXVII

A SPLENDID INHERITANCE

WITH some closely written-sheets in his hand, the lawyer presently returned to the room where his client lay eagerly awaiting him, all unsuspecting that his murderer was lying dead within a few yards of him.

"Got it all written out right?" he asked.

"I think so, Mr. Duff."

"Then send all these people away, and let me hear you read it."

The room was accordingly cleared. But after the lapse of about half an hour Mr. Sloan was heard asking for the doctors, whom Mr. Duff desired to see.

"Now, Dr. Munro," he said, in a low but quite distinct voice, when he saw them enter, "I've been making my will. Old people always do put off doing it till the very last; it's only young people that are in such a desperate hurry, lest they shouldn't have time to do it. But by Jove, I've had a narrow squeak of making an uncommon handsome present to the Crown. But I don't mean these kites of lawyers to get the bulk of everything, either, so will you please say whether I'm in a fit state to make a will, '*compos mentis*,' you know?"

"Most undoubtedly, Mr. Duff. There cannot be

the slightest question of your mind being perfectly clear."

"Good. And you concur in that opinion, Dr. Ross?"

"Certainly. In fact, it would be improbable, to the last degree, that the injuries you have received should affect the clearness of your mind."

"That's all right. Now you hear, Sloan. No going and saying you don't believe I knew what I was doing, and get up a law case over it."

The lawyer coloured; but it was no time either for jesting or resentment, so he only said, "There could be no possibility of anything of that sort, Mr. Duff."

"Very well. Now, you doctor fellows, lift me up, that I may sign the will."

The doctors looked at one another somewhat dubiously.

"Come, now, no shilly-shallying," said the old man, the dictatorial ring still sounding in his weakened voice. "I will have it. I don't care if it kills me in five minutes, if I only get time just to sign my name."

"We might gently raise mattress and all, I think," Dr. Ross said.

"It will be the only way," replied Dr. Munro. "I will ask Mr. Reid to come and help us. He is a very strong fellow."

"No, I won't have him. I don't want him," said the patient. "Get somebody else. I don't care who, so as it isn't him."

"The inspector is in the house," said Mr. Sloan.

"That'll do fine. Call him."

The inspector came, and with the utmost possible care the wounded man was gently raised, with the pillows and mattress, just as he lay, to as near a sitting posture as was necessary to enable him to sign his name. He could not repress a groan, and the drops came out on his pallid brow, but he took the pen firmly, and signed his name clearly, although the writing straggled a little. Then he was as carefully laid down again, catching his breath with a gasp as he came back to a horizontal position.

"Now, then," he said. "Witnesses! Let Dr. Ross and Sloan sign."

The signatures were accordingly appended, the old man watching the proceedings with the keenest attention.

"That's all right. Now there can't be the slightest dispute about the matter. Can there, Sloan?"

"It would be quite impossible, Mr. Duff."

"Then away you go, and get all the legal quirks and quibbles settled up at once. Pity you shouldn't get your full share of the spoils. You'll have to read the will within a week, you know." And he gave a sort of chuckle.

"Indeed, I hope not, Mr. Duff," replied the decorous lawyer. "I do not yet give up hope our medical friends here may be deceived, and that you have many years of life yet before you."

"Don't be an ass," was the candid reply. "Go and get the whole business settled off. Now, send Reid here."

The minister obeyed the summons. He was

received with a grin. "Are you come as a minister, or as a man?" asked the patient.

"I am come in whatever capacity you wish to see me, Mr. Duff. Your condition renders your will law for the moment, so long as it is possible to carry out your wishes."

"Well, I expect my first wish ain't a difficult one to carry out. I want to see that fellow Millroy. I suppose they got him, didn't they?"

Arthur Reid with difficulty suppressed a violent start. He had so utterly forgotten how little the murdered man really knew.

"Yes. They got him. But he cannot come to you."

"Why not?"

"He got a very bad fall in trying to escape, and is not in a condition to move."

"Then he'll be hung."

"No, I think not."

"Devilish shame if he isn't. They'd have hung me if I'd murdered him. Poor men are better off than rich ones in this country. I say, I've been making my will."

"So I understand."

"You ain't half a minister. Why don't you say that having settled my worldly affairs, I ought to be thinking about my immortal soul?"

"Because, Mr. Duff," replied the minister gravely, "I feel it to be quite useless to make any such suggestion to a man who in full consciousness of his critical condition can assume a tone of such lamentable levity as you choose to adopt. But now you must excuse me. I am

wanted respecting some for case."

Almost with a shudder he then, in the early dawn,—from that to which he had advanced but twenty-four hours, the officials in making a case of the scene of the tragedy, sufficient evidence of the count to carry out his fell purpose. The trees, flanking the manse grounds running up to a plantation house, had afforded him a chance in the garden unobserved. The shrubs commanding the area was trampled down by footmen exactly fitted. Having fired evidently at once made a means of which, and the plan had escaped to the hills, having netting, not visible in the view of him. The marks on the ground the violence of his fall, as a surprise that the still loaded gun gone off from the force of the

"The patient to see no one attendance upon him." Such orders. "He cannot live," I said to Arthur Reid. "See that every precaution, just as possible. He cannot be kept

So Dr. Crosbie and a host sternly repulsed even from the

a sentinel was always on duty that no sound of coming or going might disturb the absolute stillness of the house wherein the slowly dying man lay, attended by his housekeeper and a trained nurse, aided by Dr. Munro and the minister. He spoke very little, after the first twelve hours, but to Arthur Reid it seemed that whenever he was in the room those dark, watchful eyes followed him everywhere, with a gleam of mockery in them, as though even on the brink of the grave he was rejoicing in the thought of some triumph he yet hoped to achieve over the man towards whom his sentiments seemed to be so curiously mingled.

The end, when at length it came, came as it ordinarily does. A saintly deathbed it could not be, but it was equally devoid of pathos or terror. The old man slowly sank into unconsciousness, and the last breath came in the early hours of Monday morning. Then, for some hours, lay almost side by side the murderer and the murdered, genuine types of the darker side of our vaunted civilisation. The man who had heaped up wealth by sedulous provision for a diseased craving among his fellow-creatures, destructive alike to soul and body, and the man who, goaded to madness by the wreck and ruin of his life, had turned in fury on mankind, and wreaked his vengeance with scant regard for actual culpability. And from behind both loomed out, inscrutable as immutable, the great mystery of heredity; that last ominous manifestation of the inexorable reign of law.

Then arose the perplexing question who was to

act for the man who had left, knew, no living relative be Sloan, promptly appearing at that point. "I have here," andum of the wishes of the down from his own lips at will. I should like a little Reid."

"Mr. Duff has left most Mr. Sloan said, as soon as he with the minister. "As he did expressed a strong wish you duties which would naturally of kin."

"I had very much rather sponded the minister.

"I think you had better . Of course—that is to say—Mr. be the person to act the more you will only undertake social refusal would look a little ung-

There was sound sense in speech; and with some reluctance consented.

"I am very glad, very glad the lawyer said, with more situation appeared to require. the minister said afterwards regards all the circumstances suspicion on me, and thinks feeling on Mr. Duff's part des-

"Quite possible," Dr. Mun is rather an ass."

The old distiller's directions were very clear and concise. His body was to be moved to Craigmore, and the funeral to take place from thence. In Mr. Sloan's possession was a list of guests who were to be specially invited to return thither after the funeral, to be suitably entertained, and then to hear the will read.

On the following day, accordingly, immediately after the quiet burial of the hapless Edward Lane, the body of the unloved and unlamented old man was removed to the splendid abode where he had dwelt so long, amidst all the loveliness that Nature could bestow, and all the luxury that wealth could provide, without a single moment's enjoyment of the priceless blessing of a happy home.

In the inevitable pause that followed, Netherport wondered and queried, and tossed hither and thither every idle conjecture which absolute ignorance stimulated by lively curiosity could invent. Mr. Sloan walked about impenetrable and self-important, like a vulgar-minded Sphinx, incapable of dignity, and flaunting secrecy in the face of all his acquaintance by the assumption of a sort of "I could an' I would" demeanour. Mrs. Crosbie's state of agitated excitement was positively pitiable.

"It is really most harassing," she said to her husband. "We do not in the least know whether he has made good his promise to Nellie. If he has neglected to do it, which I must say would be perfectly shameful, it will not be necessary for her to have any mourning. I really don't know what to do about it."

"Why, my dear, just wait until you know."

"Pshaw! that is just like you men. You think everything can be got in a moment, and everybody saying nasty things about our friendship not going the length of a pound or two for black things unless we were sure of the cost of them."

She was really making a most needless fuss, Dr. Crosbie thought, little dreaming of the secret cause of this restless excitability. It had, of course, leaked out that Mr. Duff had made a will on his deathbed, also the sharp ears of some person in the house, during that night of confusion, had overheard Mr. Sloan say to Dr. Munro that it was a remarkable one. Feverish visions of gorgeous possibilities were rioting madly in the brain of the anxious mother. Mr. Duff had left no known relative, he had always professed much affection for her daughter. Could it be possible that within a few days she might be sweeping majestically along the streets of Netherport, mother of the wealthy young mistress of Craigmore? that very shortly she would be driving about with her in a handsome carriage, now standing in the coach-house at Craigmore, drawn by those two splendid bays which had been captured unhurt after their wild gallop among the hills? She only hoped there might be no awkward clause about Mrs. Baird! And then, lo—it was but a vision!

At length the day arrived when all these flimsy phantoms of conjecture were to be replaced by the solid substance of fact.

The long funeral train wound slowly down to the quiet cemetery, hard by the ever-sounding sea, and then the selected guests returned to Craig-

more. It was to a very considerable assemblage that, in compliance with the expressed wish of the dead man, the minister of Glendarff acted host in that gorgeous mansion, for every man possessing professional, mercantile, or municipal importance in Netherport had been bidden, and an excellent luncheon was eaten amidst the subdued hum of talk befitting the occasion. Then, after a few words with Mr. Sloan, Mr. Reid suggested an adjournment to the library. With much ceremony, the lawyer took his place at the head of the table, and spreading out his papers before him, explained that he had been especially enjoined by the late Mr. Duff to read the will in the presence of the whole company now assembled in the room. Amidst breathless silence, he proceeded to carry out his client's directions. Shorn of all legal phraseology, the provisions of the will were simple and direct.

To his faithful friend and housekeeper, Mrs. Matilda Hewson or Baird, an annuity for life, of two hundred pounds per annum. To all servants who had been in his service over two years, a full year's wages. To any who had been with him a shorter time, half that amount. To the town of Netherport five thousand pounds, to be expended for the benefit of the place in any way sanctioned by his executor, who was to have the sole right to decide the point. To his young friend, Ellen Crosbie, only daughter of the Rev. Alexander Crosbie, D.D., minister of Netherport, fifteen thousand pounds; and the whole of the residue of his property, of every sort and kind, absolutely and without any

conditions, to the Rev. Arthur Reid, minister of Glendarff, who was also appointed sole executor.

Dead stillness followed the reading of this unexpected document. Not the slightest sign of emotion of any sort betrayed with what sentiments Arthur Reid had listened to its startling terms. Throughout the whole day he had been pale and sternly self-controlled in demeanour, and thus he remained. Only when the lawyer reached the bequest to Ellen Crosbie, he had rested his elbow on the table, and shaded his face with his hand, and in that position he sat, without moving, after Mr. Sloan had come to an end of his task. Dr. Crosbie, far too prosaic ever to have dreamed of his wife's soaring aspirations, and wholly absorbed in his satisfaction at finding his daughter more richly dowered than he had expected, beamed upon the whole assemblage with complacent benevolence. Every individual member of the company was scrutinising the face of every other member, with glances tinged by his own personal sentiments, and his eagerness to ascertain the sentiments of everyone else. By the man seated at the foot of the table, with his face shaded from all observation, sole master now of all the luxury within and loveliness without, in the midst of which he sat, they were wholly forgotten. Struggling with temptation—rueing his bargain—repenting his quixotism, such according to the bent of each man's disposition, were the feelings attributed to him by those who watched him with keen curiosity, touched in the majority of cases by malice, born of envy. But they were wholly

wrong. He was neither struggling, rueing, nor repenting. He was human, and there might have been moments in the past, as there might be moments in the future, when eyes and thoughts might turn with wistful glances in the direction of the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them. But at that moment such temptation was far from him. His first sudden shading of his face had been due to an instinctive wish to hide possible traces of keen disappointment. From the moment he had known of Mr. Duff's neglect to make a will, a strong hope had grown up within him that the old man's malice might yet be foiled; that he might fail to confirm the fatal bequest; and that he himself might yet win away from the lowering influences of her home the girl whom he was confident he could easily draw upwards to his own higher level. The hope was ruthlessly crushed, and he felt it acutely for the brief moment during which he was free to grasp anything save his own personal position. Then, as he still sat rigid and silent, it was the question, not what to do, rather how to do it, that was bewildering him with the variety of aspects which seemed to demand consideration. But ever since his arrival in Glendarff, his life—to adapt a famous epigram—had been a lengthened strain, tempered by severe shocks; and this trying condition of circumstances had, within the last week, culminated in a shock of a specially startling character, coupled with almost total deprivation of rest and sleep. Hence he was just in that condition of nervous excitement when human beings are apt to become

the subjects of strange exp
lucinations, or whatsoever ter
the reverse, the mystically or
may apply to them. Thus, a
thoughts whirled through his
suddenly to grow out of the s
into which closed eyes are e
letters of blood, and vivid
before the eyes of the terror
king, those portentous words
deeply into his own soul : "T
him by hundreds who'd spen
earned, or stole, on drink, i
to work them properly. It's
house doesn't pay splendidly.

He started as if bitten by
lifted his head, the superb d
fittings of the room in whic
him, for a moment, all ting
stain of blood. Then, also,
expressions of vague wond
osity, scornful interest, in the r
on himself; and in a mom
speaking, almost unconsciou
low, concentrated tones of sup

"Mr. Sloan, it would have
ate had you given me som
before me."

"Indeed, Mr. Reid, I con
testator's commands were m
that I was to give no hint to
of his will until I read it o
the witnesses selected by him



"I understand," replied the minister, with an accent of intense scorn. Then he hastily caught himself up. "I mean that I understand what he had in his mind. Your explanation is, of course, complete. Well, Mr. Sloan, the late Mr. Duff having personally selected you as his man of business, I presume it will rest with you to take action in a situation which may, or may not, have been anticipated by him. It is not for me to say. The man who has bequeathed to me almost the whole of his great wealth is gone before the just and merciful Judge who cannot err, under circumstances of the most deeply tragical character. It is not for me now to speak one single word concerning him. But everyone here present knows the opinions I have always held — opinions strengthened, were that possible, by recent occurrences. Therefore I absolutely decline to accept Mr. Duff's bequest, to act as his executor, or to interfere in any way with his affairs. What I have already done, I have done, as you are aware, most reluctantly, only because it was the special request of a man who met a most tragical fate almost in my house."

There was a moment's pause; then a very blunt town councillor, sitting near the speaker, remarked audibly, "Mr. Reid, you are mad."

"I hope, then, Mr. Purday, my madness is akin to that of a very well-known character who received that same piece of information nearly nineteen centuries ago."

Mr. Purday, not knowing in the least what he meant, only grunted.

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victim, of the great principle of heredity. Cast by the life and conduct of those who had long ceased to have any part in the things done under the sun, into the mould in which are fused the noble impulses and stern resoluteness of earth's heroic sons, the bent of his nature was as much toward high rectitude and lofty enthusiasm as was that of the hapless victims he had seen laid in dishonoured graves towards evil passions and sinful self-indulgence.

CHAPTER XXVIII

LOST AND WON

The smell of gain is good whencesoever it proceeds.

Latin Proverb.

"WELL, of all the blasted fools!" exclaimed Mr. Purday; but a murmur of disapproval checked him.

"Too strong an expression, my dear sir," remonstrated a friend. "A crack-brained enthusiast, if you will. But really, upon my word, it is impossible to help feeling a sort of admiration for a man whose principles can stand such a strain."

"Yes, indeed," said Dr. Crosbie, with a little sigh. His slowly-moving perceptions were beginning to bring him within range of certain gorgeous possibilities which, had the prophetic gift but been vouchsafed to him and his wife, this unexpected turn of fortune's wheel might have rendered easy of attainment.

"I suppose we may congratulate you, Dr. Crosbie," said one of the party, with a curious intonation, that might mean many things.

"Oh, certainly! My virtues are not, I fear,

robust enough for such exalted flights. Thank you—thank you;" and he acknowledged with bows and smiles the felicitations of his friends.

But Mrs. Crosbie, when she heard the news, lifted up her voice and wept sore. "Oh, Alexander, if we had only hastened on the marriage at the very first, without doubt we could easily have got him to leave everything to her; and a man could not decline a bequest to his wife!"

But then, determined to assume triumph, even if she felt the sting of semi-defeat, she ordered her daughter's mourning that very afternoon, with an air of superb indifference. "Everything of the best, Miss Webster, but only just touched with crape. Nothing more will be necessary, as the bequest is not a very large one."

"My gracious! did you ever?" demanded the duly-impressed Miss Webster of her assistant; and the assistant promptly responded, "I never did."

Time, however, brought ample consolation to Mrs. Crosbie. The Craigmores property was bought from the Crown by a wealthy pawnbroker, whose only son in due course became her son-in-law, and, within a year afterward, reigned in the stead of his father. So Mrs. Crosbie did drive about Netherport in a carriage most resplendent with paint, varnish, and glittering harness, in company with her daughter, young Mrs. Dockray, the mistress of Craigmores. Mr. Dockray was, in the opinion of his mother-in-law, a rough diamond; in that of more candid critics, a coarse brute; and Mrs. Dockray, as she advanced in age, though still

bright and good-tempered, grew very noisy, and somewhat coarse in appearance and manner. But she was very rich !

"I never saw her come so near being a refined, handsome woman," an acquaintance of her married life once said to a friend, "as one day when she went with me to St. Mungo's." On that occasion Mrs. Dockray had doffed her usual gay-tinted gorgeousness, and donning her simplest garments, had gone to the crowded city church of which Arthur Reid was the minister, and with a demeanour subdued almost to pathos had listened to him preaching an eloquent sermon to the congregation which was never weary of congratulating itself on possessing the most earnest and eloquent minister in the pulpit, and the most untiring and self-sacrificing one in parochial work, that could be found in all Scotland.

Thus it is indisputable that the story has a moral, to be approved or scoffed at, according to the good pleasure of the reader. Let whosoever wavers between heroic resistance and cowardly yielding, when the great idol Self struggles hard for the gratification of some small craving of sinful indulgence, strive to cast a prophetic glance down the stream of time, and there gaze upon the consequences which may possibly ensue when his bones shall have long mouldered into dust. Then let him decide, and abide for ever by the results of his decision, whether he will cast his tiny drop into the foul, turgid flood of iniquity, sweeping away sin-stained souls and diseased bodies on its



murky waves to the broad ocean of eternity, or into that sparkling river of purity and holiness, whose streams refresh and invigorate the souls of men with a foretaste of those healing waters which flow from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

THE END.

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